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THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S USE OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN HYBRID OPERATIONS IN EUROPE

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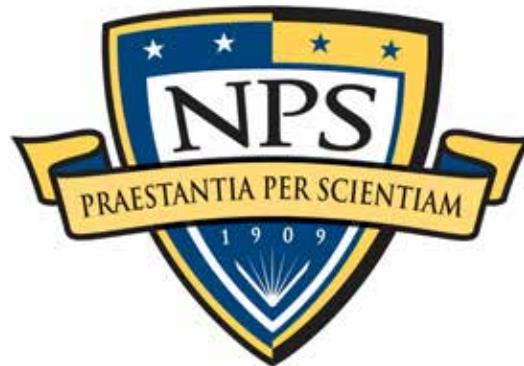
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THESIS

THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S USE OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN HYBRID OPERATIONS IN EUROPE

by

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March 2021

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13. ABSTRACT (maximum 200 words)

Under what circumstances is Russia successful in waging hybrid operations, short of the use of armed force? For the last two decades, Russia has undertaken structured cyber attacks, political destabilization, subversive activities, and psychological influence throughout the world as part of what has become known as "hybrid warfare" or "New-Type War" (NTW).

This thesis examines two contemporary European case studies—Estonia and Montenegro—where Russia has used indirect means such as proxy forces, organized crime, and other tools to conduct influence operations in its attempts to achieve its foreign policy goals. The thesis investigates how Russia has used, or tried to use, these non-state actors; how effective these operations have been; and whether Russia was successful in reaching its foreign-policy objectives in target states.

The thesis finds that Russian NTW campaigns require that there be no cohesive society in the target country. Contradictions and a divided society in the target country are the basis on which Russia can build an NTW campaign and choose the elements of NTW—non-state actors—to carry out the campaign. Thus, the most crucial aspect of launching and conducting an NTW campaign is the psychological influencing and so-called unbalancing of the target country's society and government.

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**THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION'S USE OF NON-STATE ACTORS
IN HYBRID OPERATIONS IN EUROPE**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

APT28	Advanced Persistent Threat
BCA	Balkan Cossack Army
DDoS	Distributed Denial of Service
DIRCCFC	Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries in the President of the Russian Federation Administration
EISS	Estonian Internal Security Service
EU	European Union
FSB	Russian Federal Security Service
FSB SOC	FSB Special Operations Center
GEC	U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center
GRU	Russian Main Intelligence Directorate
HMF	Historical Memory Foundation
HUMINT	Human Intelligence
KGB	Soviet Committee for State Security
MOOTW	Military Operations Other than War
MVD	Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NTW	New-Type Warfare
NWMC	Russian Night Wolves Motorcycle Club
PMC	Private Military Company
RBN	Russian Business Network
RISS	Russian Institute for Strategic Studies
SIGINT	Signals Intelligence
SVR	Russian Foreign Intelligence Service
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VV MVD	Internal Troops of Ministry for the Internal Affairs of Russia

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. MAJOR RESEARCH QUESTION

Under what circumstances is Russia successful in waging hybrid operations short of the use of armed force? For the last two decades, Russia has undertaken structured cyber-attacks, political destabilization, subversive activities, and psychological influence throughout the world as part of what has become known as "hybrid warfare" or "New-Type War" (NTW). At the same time, Russia has sponsored the involvement and training of paramilitary units and organized crime in operations abroad. The initial covert use of its specialized military units and special services brought rapid and decisive progress to the Russian Federation in annexing Crimea and destabilizing eastern Ukraine. Today, the Russian Federation remains active in spreading its influence in Europe, Eurasia, and Middle East.

This thesis examines two contemporary European case studies where Russia has used indirect means such as proxy forces, organized crime, and other tools to conduct influence operations in its attempts to achieve its foreign policy goals. I investigate how Russia has used or tried to use these non-state actors, how effective these operations have been, and whether Russia was successful in reaching its foreign policy objectives in target states. The central proposition evaluated is whether the effectiveness of Russian use of non-state actors is dependent on the target state's close geographic and/or cultural proximity to Russia.

B. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH QUESTION

In the first half of 2014, the Russian Federation annexed the Crimean Peninsula in a decisive, coordinated manner using various asymmetric military techniques. Despite the opposition and condemnation of the Western world, Russia skillfully combined the various

hybrid warfare elements to meet its strategic, operational, and tactical goals.[1] The Russian Federation incorporated Crimea virtually without a single shot, and approximately 20,000 active Ukrainian soldiers on the peninsula showed only symbolic resistance.[2] Russia completed its operations and goals so quickly that the Western world and its leaders were left only to react in surprise and admit to the fait accompli.[3]

Compared to traditional conventional warfare, the twenty-first century's military conflict features have changed decisively, and to fulfill their goals, states use different, seemingly unconnected elements in time and space simultaneously.[4] Yet, irregular means have been used in warfare in cooperation with conventional forces for centuries, and thus, the means and aims of so-called hybrid war are not entirely new.[5] What is new, or rather different, is that today's globalization, technology, and interdependence create a wholly changed and increasingly dynamic environment compared to the previous times.[6] Today's NTW is different because of the diversity, dominance, and impact of irregular assets in that changed environment.[7]

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[1] Erik Männik, "Sõjalise Kriisi Anatoomiast Ukrainas" [Anatomy of the Military Crisis in Ukraine], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], June 20, 2014, https://diplomaatia.ee/sojalise-kriisi-anatoomiast-ukrainas/; Janis Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy,* Policy Paper no. 2 (Riga, Latvia: National Defence Academy of Latvia Center for Security and Strategic Research, 2014): 3–7, https://sldinfo.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/New-Generation-Warfare.pdf.

[2] Männik, "Anatomy of the Military Crisis in Ukraine"; Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine*, 3–7.

[3] Martin Hurt, "Krimmi Sündmuste Õppetunnid: Kas Eesti Riigikaitsemudel Vastab Täielikult Meie Vajadustele?" [Lessons from the Events in Crimea: Does the Estonian National Defense Model Fully Meet Our Needs?], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], May 17, 2014, https://diplomaatia.ee/krimmi-sundmuste-oppetunnid-kas-eesti-riigikaitsemudel-vastab-taielikult-meie-vajadustele/.

[4] Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?" *Defence Studies* 18, no. 2 (2018): 113–114, https://doi.org/10.1080/14702436.2018.1429218.

[5] Alexander Lanoszka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 2016): 177–178, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1111/1468-2346.12509

[6] Frank G. Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," *Prism: A Journal of the Center for Complex Operations* 7, no. 4 (November 2018): 36–38, 40–41, ProQuest.

[7] Margarete Klein, "Russia's New Military Doctrine - NATO, the United States and the 'Colour Revolutions,'" *SWP (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik) Comment 2015/C 09* (February 2015): 2, https://www.swp-berlin.org/en/publication/russias-new-military-doctrine/; Andrew S. Bowen, *Russian Armed Forces: Military Doctrine and Strategy*, CRS Report No. IF11625 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11625.

Russian General Valery Gerasimov, the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Russia, called it new generation warfare in his, later much-cited and widely debated, 2013 article.[8] General Gerasimov announced that wars are not declared anymore and the rules of war are changed, requiring the "integrated use of military force and of political, informational, and other non-military measures."[9] Russia's actions in Ukraine have been following these views rather closely.[10] Russia appears set on honing its capacity to dismantle a target country's resistance with unconventional techniques so that eventually, the Kremlin would not need to use conventional military means to fulfill its foreign policy objectives.

The success of the Crimean operation raises the question of whether it was a unique case. Specifically, did Crimea present extremely favorable conditions that Russia could use effectively, such that similar success is unlikely in other cases?[11] Or, can Russia create similar conditions elsewhere to fulfill its plan? The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the factors contributing to and impeding Russian effectiveness in waging hybrid warfare under differing conditions.

The main proposition of this thesis is that Russia uses violent and non-violent non-state actors as proxies that are central elements in the execution of its hybrid strategy. It does so to exploit pre-existing vulnerabilities or to create the conditions necessary in the target state to make it vulnerable, either rendering it more susceptible to Russian influence or preparing the ground for further Russian activities and hostilities. The analysis seeks to determine whether the use of non-state actors is working to Russia's advantage or not, and under what circumstances it is working or not working. The factors proposed to determine the relative effectiveness of Russian hybrid operations are firstly, the target state's geographic, historical, and cultural proximity to Russia. The second factor is whether Russian conventional military assets are used in the target state.

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[8] Bowen, *Russian Armed Forces: Military Doctrine and Strategy*.

[9] Klein, "Russia's New Military Doctrine - NATO, the United States and the 'Colour Revolutions,'" 3.

[10] Klein, 3; Bowen.

[11] Bettina Renz, "Russia and 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Contemporary Politics* 22, no. 3 (2016): 284, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2016.1201316.

C.   LITERATURE REVIEW

A heated debate exists over the nature and logic of hybrid warfare. Many authors are convinced that there is nothing new or groundbreaking about it because many states have used indirect means and unconventional tactics throughout the history of war. Alexander Lanoszka brings the example that—if one takes into consideration well-published elements of Russian hybrid activities towards other states such as propaganda, proxies, or sabotage acts—then even the Second World War could be considered a hybrid war.[12] The United States Department of Defense definition of unconventional warfare aligns with this view: "activities conducted to enable a resistance movement or insurgency to coerce, disrupt, or overthrow a government or occupying power by operating through or with an underground, auxiliary, and guerrilla force in a denied area."[13] Historically, different actors have developed variations of their style, but in general unconventional warfare consists of five core elements: espionage by special services; political warfare that includes propaganda, deception, and subversion; sabotage and economic warfare by internal networks; guerrilla warfare by irregular forces; and direct action by specialized units.[14]

Another group of authors and scholars admits that irregular means have been used in wars, conflicts, and campaigns throughout the history, but argue that contemporary hybrid warfare has some elements or tactics that differ from previous times and actually do make a difference. With its interconnectedness and technologies like the Internet, the modern world has helped to modify the tactics and broaden the possibilities for states to blur the lines between peace and conflicts. But these authors are either cautious about or

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[12] Lanoszka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," 178.

[13] United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms,* JP 1-02 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2016): 249, https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1004650.pdf.

[14] David Kilcullen, "The Evolution of Unconventional Warfare," *Scandinavian Journal of Military Studies* 2, no. 1 (2019): 62, https://doi.org/10.31374/sjms.35

opposed to identifying hybrid warfare as a novel Russian invention of warfare.[15] On the contrary, Russia's particular combination of different methods in warfare is the realization of practices and experiences tested over time.[16]

On the other hand, those who espouse the novelty of the hybrid warfare concept argue that the quick and decisive activities Russia demonstrated in annexing Crimea suggest that Moscow has developed an up-to-date approach of hybrid means in armed conflict that would give the Russian Federation a clear advantage against neighboring states and the West in possible future conflicts.[17] The combination of contemporary hybrid threats, a variety of lethal and non-lethal elements—the results of globalization, the dissemination of military technologies, and the information revolution—are qualitatively distinct from less complicated dangers posed only from unconventional or paramilitary troops.[18] The variety of these indirect options helps the aggressor to avert the political consequences of warfare and minimize the economic and human strain of war.[19] In general, these options cannot be eliminated solely by Western counterterrorism tactics or long-term counterinsurgency methods.[20]

It is essential to point out that from the Russian point of view, the fighting or mode of warfare they are practicing and implementing is not hybrid warfare, but "new-type"

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[15] Andrew Monaghan, "The 'War' in Russia's 'Hybrid Warfare,'" *Parameters* 45, no. 4 (2015-16): 65–74, ProQuest; Ofer Fridman, "Hybrid Warfare or Gibridnaya Voyna?" *The RUSI Journal* 162, no. 1 (2017): 46, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1080/03071847.2016.1253370; Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New Is Russia's 'New Way of War'?" *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 27, no. 2 (2016): 282–301, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1080/09592318.2015.1129170; Mark Galeotti, "(Mis)Understanding Russia's Two Hybrid Wars," Eurozine, last modified November 29, 2018: 6–8, https://www.eurozine.com/misunderstanding-russias-two-hybrid-wars/?pdf.

[16] Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 39.

[17] Hurt, " Lessons from the Events in Crimea: Does the Estonian National Defense Model Fully Meet Our Needs?"; Renz, "Russia and 'Hybrid Warfare,'" 284; Soňa Rusnáková, "Russian New Art of Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine," *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 17, no. 3–4 (2017): 370, DOI: 10.1515/sjps-2017-0014.

[18] Hoffman, 38.

[19] Krieg and Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?" 127.

[20] Hoffman, 38.

warfare (NTW).[21] Charles K. Bartles says that the term hybrid warfare is the West's invention, one that was attributed to the concept of new era warfare that General Gerasimov discussed in his 2013 article.[22] Bartles emphasizes that "there is a general consensus in Russian military circles that hybrid war is a completely Western concept as no Russian military officer or strategist has discussed it, except to mention the West's use of the term, or to mention the West's use of hybrid warfare against Russia."[23] In describing and analyzing Russia's activities, the author uses the term NTW in this thesis.

Russia's war with Ukraine is often cited as a primary example of this NTW. Russian activities in Crimea showed the significant dominance of irregular tactics and operations compared to nearly non-existent usage of the conventional military's actions to resolve the conflict.[24] Even using non-traditional or irregular techniques, Russia's strategy in Ukraine has been different and multifaceted. Frank G. Hoffman argues that Russia's actions in Crimea may have been unexpected because it illegally used its advanced military capabilities in officially unidentifiable forms and combined them with irregular forces and tactics. But he says that in eastern Ukraine, the methods are examples of classical hybrid warfare, seen even before the twenty-first century, where the Russian military, with its multiple capabilities, plays a significant role in cooperation with non-state actors.[25] What seems to make Russian actions in Ukraine different from the previous understanding of war, or even so-called classical hybrid warfare, is that Russia built up its whole campaign on an NTW strategy, trying to win the entire conflict using primarily NTW.

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[21] Timothy L. Thomas, *Russian Military Thought: Concepts and Elements*, MP190451V1 (McLean, VA: Mitre Corporation, 2019): 4–11—4-12, 5–1, https://www.mitre.org/sites/default/files/publications/pr-19-1004-russian-military-thought-concepts-elements.pdf; Charles K. Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (January-February 2016): 33, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/military-review/Archives/English/MilitaryReview_20160228_art009.pdf.

[22] Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," 33.

[23] Bartles, 33–34.

[24] Vladimir Rauta, "Towards a Typology of Non-State Actors in "Hybrid Warfare": Proxy, Auxiliary, Surrogate and Affiliated Forces," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, (2019): 4, https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1656600; Lanoszka, "Russian Hybrid Warfare and Extended Deterrence in Eastern Europe," 178; United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men": A Primer on Modern Russian Unconventional Warfare, Ukraine 2013–2014*, (Fort Bragg, NC: USASOC, 2015): 49–52, https://www.jhuapl.edu/Content/documents/ARIS_LittleGreenMen.pdf.

[25] Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 38–39.

This thesis seeks to contribute to this debate through an evaluation of Russia's use of non-state actors to achieve its foreign policy objectives in Europe and the United States. In so doing, it will help shed light on whether Russian NTW operations can be successful if they do not involve the use of significant armed force.

D.   POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS

The central proposition to be evaluated in this thesis is that Russia's activities using unconventional means are more efficient and effective in an environment close to Russia geographically, with historical ties and cultural similarities and convenient preconditions for action. Factors such as a Russian diaspora, Russian language-speakers, are argued to be conducive to successful Russian NTW operations. The effectiveness of Russia's unconventional techniques is posited to decline in countries where these factors are absent and where vulnerabilities need to be created rather than exploited. Additionally, this thesis evaluates the proposition that Russian NTW operations are less effective when they lack the use of armed forces, unlike in the cases in Georgia, Ukraine, Libya, and Syria. The expectation is that Russia is less likely to use overt force against countries that are members of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union (EU). According to the second proposition then, Russian NTW operations should be less effective in EU and NATO countries than in non-member countries. Examination of these countries and the non-member countries allows for refinement of our knowledge regarding whether and how covert, low-scale Russian-sponsored violence can successfully accomplish Russian objectives. A third proposition is that non-state actor coordination or independence impacts the effectiveness of Russian NTW. The expectation is that coordination will improve effectiveness while independence impedes it.

E.   RESEARCH DESIGN

To evaluate these propositions, the thesis compares two case studies where Russia has used irregular means. The cases are chosen based on varying geographical proximity and historical ties to Russia. In each study, I conduct an analysis that provides an overview of Russia's activities and—given the nature of the region and the situation in the target states—its choices of which non-state actors to use to achieve its goals, as well as their

relative success. The first case study centers on Estonia. Estonia, a post-Soviet state located in the so-called Russian near-abroad, is a NATO and EU member but remains in the strong sphere of the Russian Federation's interest and influence. The second case study investigates Montenegro. This case offers differing degrees of non-state actor coordination by Russian state agencies, allowing for evaluation of the third proposition.

The case studies examine which non-state assets Russia has used in different environments, the results in terms of Russian success or failure, and whether the cases have been resolved or remained open. This analysis makes it possible to determine whether and in which conditions and situations Russian non-state assets and techniques are successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful.

I search for indicators of what violent and non-violent non-state actors Russia has used or tried to use in the countries described. If at least two sources confirm that Russia has used one or more actors whose description and character overlap with the actors defined in Chapter II, I can include them in my case studies. After identifying the actors' use in the target country, I examine how and to what extent Russia used them as well as the result. Hence, I can determine what has changed in the target country after Russia's use of non-state actors, whether country-specific cases are resolved, open, or so-called frozen, and the target state's and Russia's relations afterward. Analyzing this way, I can point out what impact the Russian methods have had in different regions and what the probable reasons are for their success or failure. Consequently, I can point out which non-state actors Russia is likely to continue to use or develop in different regions in the future.

Finally, a scheme is compiled, showing which non-state actors Russia employs, how they are linked to the Russian leadership, and their cooperation with each other. This thesis's source materials include academic articles and books that describe and analyze the actors and their previous use and cases that are investigated. Also, newspaper articles and open-source materials are used to support the analysis using the latest information.

F. THESIS OVERVIEW

Chapter II examines the literature on Russian hybrid warfare and gives an overview of different state and non-state actors that Russia uses in its hybrid campaigns, and the

types of coordination possible among them. The examination generates a schema to be completed through the empirical investigations of non-state actor usage and the effectiveness of such methods. Chapter III examines Russia's irregular use of non-state actors in Estonia, a former Soviet republic and now member of the EU and NATO. Chapter IV similarly analyzes Montenegro. The final chapter draws conclusions about the three propositions, and the relative effectiveness of Russian irregular operations and the conditions that facilitate or impede them. The chapter provides a scheme based on the author's conclusions about the types, degrees of coordination, and probable pattern of using non-state actors in building up the NTW campaign. In addition, two more mini-studies, the Catalan referendum in Spain in 2017 and North Macedonia's aspirations to join NATO, are examined to confirm the drawn conclusions.

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II. THE CONCEPT OF RUSSIAN NEW-TYPE WARFARE

A. INTRODUCTION

Whether Russia's contemporary approach to warfare is novel or not—and there are compelling arguments on both sides—the actual question may be: Could Russia increasingly achieve, in today's globalized and technology- and information-rich environment, its political objectives—eroding Western solidarity and unity—without resorting to the direct use of significant military assets? The notion of hybrid warfare, as it is unraveled, looks at the different phases of conflict and focuses on undermining the enemy in the first phase, seemingly peacetime, to prepare the ground for later phases of conflict. We need to divide up the conflict concept and see if Russia can achieve its goals mainly by non-military means, just by owning and threatening to use its military force, but not actually using it.

Russia's modern conflict with the West is primarily a confrontation and a struggle over values. It is highly unlikely that great powers with nuclear weapons are willing to get into a military confrontation with each other. This was already evident during the Cold War. But if the contemporary struggle between Russia and the West is not about occupying and then physically controlling territory, then why would it be necessary to include the kinetic military warfare part to the campaign? In such a case, Russia needs time to undermine and fracture the West's cohesion consistently, and in that case, the use of non-state actors combined with information operations and cyberattacks would be the key players in this societal, psychological-informational, and remote conflict. These means—considerably cheaper than conventional and nuclear capabilities—provide deniability to Russia and create confusion and disagreements in the West. If these means can accomplish the political objectives of creating strong distrust not only of democracy, but Western organizations and Western unity, then Russia has already won. To that end, Russia considers it important to be active and find ways to divide the West in areas where it is easiest and where Russia feels more comfortable—often in its "near-abroad." It is also crucial for Russia to maintain its existing influence in regions that are often also in its immediate neighborhood, such as Georgia and Ukraine.

One of the central questions in the debate about Russian "new-type" warfare is, "is Ukraine unique?" This question is a side issue, and it does not matter whether Ukraine is unique if the actual problem is whether Russia can achieve its goals without having to conquer territory. If this is the case, then the most critical part of the whole concept of hybrid war or NTW is the first stage, the so-called preparation phase for later stages. What does make Ukraine unique is that stage one was already built-in due to Soviet history, and that goes to emphasize the relevancy of Russia dominating the first stage of a conflict.

What if dominating in the first stage and ultimately winning just the initial phase is enough for Russia to defeat opponents in a globalized and information-laden world? This argument suggests that non-state actors play an essential role in the first phases of Russian activities in trying to weaken or dismantle the target state as much as possible. If the target states are members of an organization such as NATO or the EU, an additional goal would be to alienate and divide the target states from other member states to isolate the target and shatter the organization's cohesion. So, at the end or in the decisive phases of conflict, Russian military forces would have the most straightforward task to formalize the job with minimal effort because the targets, now sufficiently and deeply politically divided, are unlikely to or incapable of implementing a coordinated anti-Russian policy. An even more favorable option would be that military combat operations would not be necessary at all, as non-state actors' activities would have thrown the target states into chaos, and the organizations to which they belong would be divided, fragmented, and experiencing existential threats.

We first need to understand the debate about the novelty of Russia's way of warfare. Then we can turn to the central question of whether Russia can achieve its aims without significant use of force, leveraging only the background presence of its hard power.

B.   CONTEMPORARY WARFARE

How much does contemporary warfare differ from warfare of the past? Andreas Krieg and Jean-Marc Rickli emphasize that "the entire socio-political and geo-strategic context in which warfare in the twenty-first century is conducted, is fundamentally different from the purely Westphalian, Clausewitzian ideas of warfare that were prevalent

in the late eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century."[26] In the past, war was characterized and built on three main pillars: 1. Objectives, which consisted of defense and attack; 2. Means that involved nuclear and conventional capabilities; 3. The scale of struggle, which adjusted strategic, operational, and tactical operations.[27]

In the 1990s, however, the U.S. military and Department of Defense increasingly started to talk about a fourth pillar, the forms of war, which consist of: "*information warfare*; *precision warfare* (which features information processing, stealthy, remote, and non-contact attacks, and speed, accuracy, and limited casualties); *joint operations*; and *military operations other than war* (MOOTW)."[28] Today, countries seek to achieve goals in indirect contactless campaigns. In these campaigns, the strategic, operational, and tactical layers and offensive and defensive actions have become less distinct.[29] National armies are not a key element in influencing outcomes because "the state in the twenty-first century is frequently seeking to externalize the weight of warfare to human and technological surrogates."[30] Along these lines, in 1999, Chinese People's Liberation Army Colonels Qiao Ling and Wang Xiangsui introduced the Combination Warfare concept.[31] It was an analysis of modern warfare that emphasized that a purely military option is only one part, like a 'Lego' piece, which can be added to the conflict to complicate opponents' overall picture.[32]

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[26] Krieg and Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?," 113.

[27] James Callard and Peter Faber, "An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2002): 62, https://www.jstor.org/stable/43133476.

[28] Callard and Faber, "An Emerging Synthesis for a New Way of War: Combination Warfare and Future Innovation," 62.

[29] United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 18.

[30] Krieg and Rickli, 113–114.

[31] Callard and Faber, 62.

[32] Callard and Faber, 63.

Previously, the irregular and conventional "components occurred in different theatres or in distinctly different formations."[33] Now, these forces blend into common forces in the same "battlespace," where they are operationally combined and tactically mixed. Remarkably, the unconventional component of the force becomes dominant.[34] The battlespace is not necessarily territorial, but it is necessarily societal. The combination of contemporary hybrid threats, a variety of lethal and non-lethal elements—the results of globalization, the dissemination of military technologies, and the information revolution— are qualitatively distinct from less complicated dangers posed only from unconventional or paramilitary troops.[35]

Today, in principle, non-hybrid wars no longer occur, and conflicts that lead to armed confrontations begin long before the war is officially recognized and end only long after the signing of the peace treaty.[36] They start in the form of information wars, acts of diversion, and guerrilla fights, which is also the basis of modern military planning at the level of the Russian General Staff.[37] Modern warfare is a nodal-style conflict where one has to attack particular connections, control elements, and centerpieces of the enemy's build-up.[38] To fulfill the goals, different elements, seemingly unconnected in time and

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[33] Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007), 8, https://potomacinstitute.org/images/stories/publications/potomac_hybridwar_0108.pdf.

[34] Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 8.

[35] Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 38.

[36] Jaanus Piirsalu, "FSB Infosõjaspets: Venemaa Loob Kiiresti Oma Erasõjaväeüksused" [FSB Information Warfare Specialist: Russia Is Rapidly Setting up Its Private Military Units], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], June 10, 2016, https://diplomaatia.ee/fsb-infosojaspets-venemaa-loob-kiiresti-oma-erasojavaeuksused/.

[37] Piirsalu, "FSB Information Warfare Specialist: Russia Is Rapidly Setting up Its Private Military Units."

[38] Jeffrey Larsen, "Principles of Russian Foreign Policy" (online lecture, NS4000: Great Power Competition: Current Policy and Strategy course, Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, CA, August 2020): 23:38–23:52, https://cle.nps.edu/portal/site/863193e1-160e-4b64-ad3b-ad9d6c187b4a/tool/0a0b5489-a809-4e3b-96e0-25406d17070b.

space, are used simultaneously.[39] Chief of the Russian General Staff, General Gerasimov said in 2016 that modern war is prepared and supported by information influencing, including the use of the Internet, to change mass consciousness; this can occasionally replace armed intervention.[40] Warfare conducted mainly by non-state actors who are supported by seemingly indirect means is likely to become the new norm in the twenty-first century's war and future security environment.[41]

C.   RUSSIAN UNDERSTANDING OF MODERN WARFARE

According to Dr. Richard Weitz, a senior research fellow at the Hudson Institute and director of the Center for Military-Political Analysis, "Russia's recent aggressions against its neighbors have been accompanied by cyber-attacks, information operations, psychological pressure, manipulation of the press, economic threats, acting through proxies, crafty propaganda, exploiting ethnic contradictions, and favoring influence agents, both conscious and occasional, in foreign countries through the use of influence tools and placing blame in ways that could attract a sympathetic audience."[42] One by one, these tactics do no significant damage, but together they can weaken the target country and prepare the ground for an invasion or incitement to rebellion.[43]

From 2013 until 2015, senior Russian military officers published three articles that can be considered as representatives of dominant Russian military thought at the highest

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[39] Raimonds Rublovskis, "Läti Riigikaitse Aktuaalsed Probleemid Ukraina Konflikti Valguses" [Topical Problems of Latvian National Defense in the Light of the Conflict in Ukraine], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], May 17, 2014, http://www.diplomaatia.ee/artikkel/lati-riigikaitse-aktuaalsed-probleemid-ukraina-konflikti-valguses/; Bērziņš, *Russia's New Generation Warfare in Ukraine: Implications for Latvian Defense Policy*.

[40] Larsen, "Principles of Russian Foreign Policy," 23:15–23:31.

[41] Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century*, 7; Michèle A. Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "The Defense Inheritance: Challenges and Choices for the Next Pentagon Team," *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 4 (September 2008): 60, 63, https://doi.org/10.1162/wash.2008.31.4.59; Joseph S. Nye, Jr., *The Future of Power* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2011), 33–39; Raymond T. Odierno, "The U.S. Army in a Time of Transition: Building a Flexible Force," *Foreign Affairs* 91, no. 3 (May/June 2012): 10, ProQuest Central; Krieg and Rickli, "Surrogate Warfare: The Art of War in the 21st Century?" 127.

[42] Richard Weitz, "Silmitsi Venemaa Hübriidohtudega" [Facing Russia's Hybrid Threats], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], November 21, 2014, https://diplomaatia.ee/silmitsi-venemaa-hubriidohtudega/.

[43] Weitz, "Facing Russia's Hybrid Threats."

echelons.[44] All of these high-level Russian officers emphasize that the nature of modern warfare and conflict is changing rapidly and continuously, and the key for Russia is to develop and adapt to new forms and methods of combat.[45] One of these officers, General Gerasimov, states that Russia cannot simply copy other countries' experiences; the development of Russian warfare methods must continue uninterrupted until a leading position is reached on modernized weaponry and asymmetric warfare vis-à-vis the West.[46] He emphasizes that the ratio of non-military to military methods in modern conflict is four to one.[47]

Retired General-Lieutenant Sergey Bogdanov and Colonel in reserve Sergey Chekinov emphasize that the keys to success in the new generation of wars are dominance in the information sphere and psychological operations that devastate the adversary's defense structures personnel and society both morally and psychologically.[48] According to the authors, it is essential to establish so-called information and psychological warfare superiority. This concept means controlled information pressure, which creates confusion and chaos in the target state's population, through the media, non-governmental and religious organizations, propaganda, and deceptive information.[49] The primary target of destabilizing propaganda would be extremists and radicals among the victim state's population.[50]

In the information-manipulated environment, then, covert agents, supplied with necessary funds, weaponry, and equipment, will be infiltrated into the targeted state to

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[44] Timothy Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War," *Military Review* 97, no. 4 (July-August 2017): 41, https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Journals/Military-Review/English-Edition-Archives/July-August-2017/Thomas-Russias-Way-of-War/.

[45] Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War," 41.

[46] Valeriy Gerasimov, "Ценность науки в предвидении" [The Value of Science in Foresight], *VPK-News no. 8*, February 27–March 5, 2013, 3, https://vpk-news.ru/sites/default/files/pdf/VPK_08_476.pdf.

[47] Gerasimov, "The Value of Science in Foresight," 3.

[48] Sergey Chekinov and Sergey Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War," *Military Thought*, 16, 18–19, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.usni.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Chekinov-Bogdanov%20Miltary%20Thought%202013.pdf.

[49] Chekinov and Bogdanov, "The Nature and Content of a New-Generation War," 17–19.

[50] Chekinov and Bogdanov, 20.

spread further chaos and panic and incite dissatisfied and rebellious residents against the state.[51] If the military operations are inevitable, Bogdanov and Chekinov suggest, "Before the outbreak of war, nonmilitary measures, such as establishment of no-fly zones over the country to be attacked, imposition of blockades, and extensive use of private military companies in close cooperation with armed opposition units, may be applied as new methods of interstate warfare."[52]

In early 2015, General-Lieutenant Andrey V. Kartapolov, then chief of the Russian General Staff's Main Operations Directorate, discussed the NTW elements in his speech at the Russian Academy of Military Science.[53] Kartapolov presents mostly the same principles as Gerasimov, Bogdanov, and Chekinov, but covers them from a slightly different angle and develops them further. He emphasizes that non-traditional solutions are being developed to effectively compensate for Russia's technological backwardness in comparison to its adversaries.[54] Russia uses all the NTW nuances to prepare its capabilities, and enemies will be confronted with newly developed asymmetric methods.[55] He emphasizes that NTW consists of 80 to 90 percent of propaganda and psychological operations and 10 to 20 percent of direct violent operations.[56] As part of his conclusion, General Kartapolov points out that Russia will continue to implement and develop its NTW capabilities fully and, in particular, implement asymmetric capabilities in this form, which may lead to more novel ways of warfare in the future.[57]

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[51] Chekinov and Bogdanov, 20.

[52] Chekinov and Bogdanov, 20.

[53] Thomas, "The Evolving Nature of Russia's Way of War," 39.

[54] Thomas, 39.

[55] Thomas, 39.

[56] Thomas, 40.

[57] Thomas, 42.

D.   IS RUSSIAN-PRACTICED NTW REALLY A NOVEL CONCEPT?

Frank G. Hoffman argues that, concerning Russia, the combination of different methods in warfare is the realization of practices and experiences tested over time.[58] He further states that "the Cold War and recent experience with Russia suggests that the mixture of political, economic, and subversive activity is a consistent element of their operational art."[59] The Soviet Union regularly applied so-called active measures in the information realm that included fabrication, propaganda, and inaccurate stories or "fake news."[60] "Active measures" and "assistance programs" or "assistance operations" were invented by the Soviet KGB to influence the course of events in a specific country or region and to change its policy in ways favorable to the Soviet Union's position.[61] These programs were based on 95-percent accurate information to which something was added, changed, or nuances manipulated to turn the data into targeted information or disinformation.[62]

There are also other tools of confusing the adversary that have Soviet and even Tsarist origins. For example, "*Maskirovka*, the complex of measures devised to confuse the enemy regarding the "presence and disposition of forces, their condition, readiness, actions and plans," has been an object of military-academic study in Russia since 1904."[63] In many ways, the Cold War can also be considered the spy war, and it was perceived as such by the public.[64] During this conflict, Soviet intelligence developed a unique 'illegals' program, which meant that well-prepared intelligence officers were sent under deep cover to foreign countries.[65] The 'illegals' task was to integrate deeply into the adversary's

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[58] Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 39.

[59] Hoffman, 32.

[60] Hoffman, 32.

[61] Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan, *The New Nobility: The Restoration of Russia's Security State and the Enduring Legacy of the KGB* (New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2010), 108.

[62] Soldatov and Borogan, *The New Nobility,* 109.

[63] James Sherr, *The Militarization of Russian Policy*, 2017 Paper Series No.10 (Washington, DC: Transatlantic Academy, 2017), 6–7, https://www.academia.edu/34568065/ THE_MILITARIZATION_OF_RUSSIAN_POLICY.

[64] Gordon Corera, *Russians Among Us: Sleeper Cells, Ghost Stories, and the Hunt for Putin's Spies* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers Inc, 2020), 5.

[65] Corera, *Russians Among Us*, 5.

society and patiently create networks and positions that would give the Soviet Union access to the most valuable information.[66] Because spying did not stop with the end of the Cold War, direct parallels to the Cold War events are often sought today.[67] Gordon Corera states that, "It is tempting to talk about a "new Cold War." That conflict is long gone. There is a new one that is being fought today with both old techniques, like illegals, and new ones."[68]

According to James Sherr, there are five significant differences between Russia's contemporary situation and activities and those of the Cold War. First, with the signing of the Helsinki Final Act in 1975, the Soviet Union accepted in principle the borders and balance of power in Europe.[69] Today, Russia is clearly dissatisfied with the rules agreed to in 1975 and seeks ways and justifications to replace them with principles based on the great powers' spheres of influence, where small states have limited sovereignty.[70] Second, contrary to light-hearted threats, the Soviet leadership realized the seriousness of the use of nuclear weapons, which led to efforts to establish a functioning arms control system with the West.[71] Nonetheless, the modern Russian Federation has undermined previous arms control regime agreements or understandings when it violated, for example, the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty or rejected the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.[72] Third, the Cold War leaders and decision makers mainly understood the standpoint and possibilities of their opponent and themselves.[73] Today, Russia's and the West's assessment of each other's abilities and intentions are in stark contrast and full of uncertainty.[74] Fourth, today, in contrast to the Cold War era, Russian "non-linear," "network," and "new generation" warfare—in the Western understanding "hybrid"

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[66] Corera, 6.

[67] Corera, 5.

[68] Corera, 9.

[69] Sherr, *The Militarization of Russian Policy*, 2.

[70] Sherr, 2.

[71] Sherr, 2.

[72] Sherr, 2.

[73] Sherr, 2.

[74] Sherr, 2.

warfare—"is designed to blur the thresholds between internal and interstate conflict and between peace and war."[75] Fifth, the demarcation line in the Cold War was far from the borders of the Soviet Union.[76] Today, the distance has disappeared, and the so-called demarcation line runs along or in the vicinity of the Russian Federation's borders. The buffer zone's disappearance and Russia's vague threats and actions could lead to misunderstandings, unintentional escalation, and loss of control.[77]

E.   THE IMPORTANCE OF RUSSIAN ARMED FORCES IN NTW

Skeptics insist that ultimately Russian military might is what has been decisive in achieving successes in Ukraine, Georgia, and Syria. In this view, "without the backing of hard power, Moscow's hybrid activities in Europe would not be nearly as effective."[78] Hybrid tactics are applied when the use of open military activity is not practical or feasible, but the Russian Federation's hard power is always perceptible in the background.[79] Hybrid warfare and even covert operations have strength and potential only if the aggressor has capable combat forces as a reserve that, if necessary, can be used to threaten and escalate the situation to the next level.[80] Ivo Juurvee and Mariita Mattiisen state that, "both Russia's practice and doctrine leave the door open for deliberate escalation of hybrid conflict to war."[81]

Russia is trying to use a combination of means that give it the flexibility to react to changing events and force the adversary to act in an environment shaped by Russian

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[75] Sherr, 2.

[76] Sherr, 2.

[77] Sherr, 2.

[78] Nicole Ng and Eugene Rumer, "The West Fears Russia's Hybrid Warfare. They're Missing the Bigger Picture," Carnegie, last modified July 3, 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/07/03/west-fears-russia-s-hybrid-warfare.-they-re-missing-bigger-picture-pub-79412.

[79] Ng and Rumer, "The West Fears Russia's Hybrid Warfare. They're Missing the Bigger Picture."

[80] Sherr, *The Militarization of Russian Policy*, 6.

[81] Ivo Juurvee and Mariita Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007: Revisiting an Early Case of Hybrid Conflict,* (Tallinn, Estonia: ICDS 2020): 39, https://icds.ee/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/ICDS_Report_The_Bronze_Soldier_Crises_of_2007_Juurvee_Mattiisen_August_2020.pdf.

rules.[82] If the situation requires the use of conventional Russian units, "mobility, shock, striking power, and speed matter as much they did in the past."[83] For example, when Russian-supported Donbas separatists in eastern Ukraine were on the verge of destruction in 2014 and 2015, Russia activated and included its nearby battle elements to that struggle and turned around the unfavorable course.[84] Moscow has thus shifted the combined-arms concept to the so-called all-domain concept that incorporates its conventional military with psychological-informational means, special purpose forces, and non-state actors.[85] This concept seeks to accomplish determinant effects in the opening stage of the war and "as demonstrated in Ukraine, it is possible today to achieve strategic objectives before the adversary realizes that war has begun."[86]

The Russian Federation's mobilization for a state of war differs significantly from the Soviet version. In the past, a state of war meant the activities of a massive army at the strategic level, along with the activation of all the vast support functions that made it possible.[87] During the Cold War, the Soviet state's mobilization also included the activation of nuclear weapons.[88] The state of war in modern times, Russia's present military leadership maintains, contrasts sharply with the Second World War model and even from the Cold War conflict. In contemporary conflicts, the difference rests in the technological and "psychological-informational" environments.[89]

F.   RUSSIA'S STRUGGLE FOR VALUES AND INFLUENCE, NOT
        NECESSARILY FOR TERRITORY

The Russian Federation in today's world "is setting itself up as an ideological alternative to the EU [and the West], with a different approach to sovereignty, power and

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[82] Sherr, 6.

[83] Sherr, 6.

[84] Sherr, 6.

[85] Sherr, 6.

[86] Sherr, *The Militarization of Russian Policy*, 2, 6.

[87] Sherr, 5.

[88] Sherr, 5.

[89] Sherr, 5; United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 17.

world order. Moscow believes that laws are mere expressions of power—and that when the balance of power changes, laws should be changed to reflect it."[90] Hence, Russia is pursuing an aggressive, wide-ranging, and multifaceted campaign to fragment European unity and to prevent it from interfering or challenging its 'near abroad' actions.[91]

Russian security executives continue to display the belief that keeping NATO under pressure could eventually fatigue some members' loyalty to the organization and hope that a combination of internal disputes in the EU and Russia's own machinations will fragment the unity of the Union.[92] To this end, Russia displays the preparations of its armed forces and threatens to use them, if it considers that it is cornered by the West and other methods have been exhausted to protect its interests and security.[93] Thus, Russia's unpredictable and extensive NTW activity, the combination of military and non-military elements, is designed to exhaust adversaries by causing confusion and disputes among them.[94] It is complicated for international bodies such as NATO and the EU to find answers to this.[95]

The Russian leadership understands that it cannot win a long-term war against NATO and the United States because it is outmanned, outgunned, and outspent by the West.[96] Perhaps Moscow's greatest disadvantage is its lack of universal ideology, but it is trying to exhaust the West by undermining Western narratives and ideology.[97] Mark

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[90] Mark Leonard and Nicu Popescu, *A Power Audit of EU-Russia Relations* (London, UK: ECFR, 2007): 1, https://www.ecfr.eu/archive/page/-/ECFR-02_A_POWER_AUDIT_OF_EU-RUSSIA_RELATIONS.pdf.

[91] Mark Galeotti, *Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia's Political Use of its Military in Europe since 2014*, ECFR/200 (London, UK: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016): 1, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/Heavy_Metal_Diplomacy_Final_2.pdf.

[92] Galeotti, *Heavy Metal Diplomacy: Russia's Political Use of its Military in Europe since 2014*, 8.

[93] Galeotti, 1.

[94] "What Russia Wants: From Cold War to Hot War," *Economist*, February 14, 2015, http://www.economist.com/news/briefing/21643220-russias-aggression-ukraine-part-broader-and-more-dangerous-confrontation.

[95] "What Russia Wants."

[96] Larsen, "Principles of Russian Foreign Policy," 19:30–19:40.

[97] James Rogers and Andri Tyushka, "Venemaa „Hegemooniavastane" Pealetung: Uus Strateegia Praktikas" [Russia's "Anti-hegemonic" Attack: A New Strategy in Practice], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], December 16, 2016, https://diplomaatia.ee/venemaa-hegemooniavastane-pealetung-uus-strateegia-praktikas/.

Galeotti refers to the mindset of a group of unidentified Russian intelligence, "If the West loses, we gain," as best at describing the Russian approach.[98] For that reason, Moscow has adopted a hybrid approach in conjunction with nuclear intimidation to try to fragment the unity and the cohesion of Europe and the West.[99]

Russia believes that contemporary methods or operations endeavor to apply nearly constant pressure in a unified influence space.[100] The aim is to weaken opponents from within. Reducing the state's security, as well as its economic and political capability, before the actual so-called war starts accomplishes this weakening.[101] The campaign's primary goal is not the physical occupation of the territory but to secure Russia's influence in the target country or area and make its policy useful to Russia. According to General Gerasimov, in the event of war, the modern environment provides an opportunity to ensure the rapid destruction of critical infrastructure and military resistance without the use of massive armies or nuclear weapons.[102] Even war—the third phase, involving kinetic military action—translates as using only necessary military units and, if possible, entering the country under some cover, such as peacekeepers, to pacify the territory and eventually install a government that favors and supports the aggressor.[103] However, the fact that Russia would feel confident in starting a rapid and successful military operation presupposes the existence, amplification, or creation of favorable pre-conditions on the ground by non-kinetic military means and non-state actors.

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[98] Mark Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra: Inside Russia's Intelligence Services,* ECFR/169 (London, UK: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2016): 5, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR_169_-_PUTINS_HYDRA_INSIDE_THE_RUSSIAN_INTELLIGENCE_SERVICES_1513.pdf.

[99] Larsen, 19:40–20:10, 24:00–24:50.

[100] Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," 32–33.

[101] Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," 32–33.

[102] Sherr, *The Militarization of Russian Policy*, 5.

[103] Bartles, 33.

G. NON-MILITARY ASSETS AND MEANS THAT RUSSIA EXPLOITS AGAINST ITS ADVERSARIES

This thesis has a central focus on the numerous non-state actors acting on the orders of Russian state entities engaged in Russian NTW. Non-state actors are tools in the arsenal of Russian NTW, and their activities and use are covertly coordinated and managed by Russian special services. This thesis proposes that these actors are key factors in the relative success or failure of Russian NTW operations. To analyze non-state actors' actions, it is also necessary to understand the Russian national special services' activities and roles. The next section describes the central state and main non-state actors involved in Russian NTW.

1. Russian State Actors

This thesis examines the main state actors involved in Russian NTW, particularly the Main Directorate of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation (*Гла́вное управле́ние Генера́льного шта́ба Вооружённых Сил Росси́йской Федера́ции – Г.У.*, the G.U.), formerly the Main Intelligence Directorate (*Гла́вное разве́дывательное управле́ние –* ГРУ, the GRU).[104] The agency is still commonly known by its previous abbreviation, the GRU, which is used in this thesis. The second state actor is the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (*Федеральная служба безопасности Российской Федерации –* ФСБ, the FSB). The third is Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (*Слу́жба вне́шней разве́дки Росси́йской Федера́ции –* СВР РФ, the SVR). Contrary to Soviet practice, where the KGB held most of its intelligence and security responsibilities, Russia's modern approach is more diverse, and many of the tasks, activities, and areas of responsibility of the three main intelligence agencies overlap.[105]

a. The GRU

The GRU, becoming more active worldwide to operate without diplomatic cover, seems to be the leading Russian intelligence agency for managing organized crime,

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[104] Guy Faulconbridge, "What is Russia's GRU Military Intelligence Agency?" *Reuters*, October 5, 2018, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-russia-gru-factbox/what-is-russias-gru-military-intelligence-agency-idUSKCN1MF1VK.

[105] Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra*, 3.

insurgents, and other violent non-state actors abroad.[106] Russian intelligence agencies play an even more significant role in eastern Ukraine than they did in Crimea.[107] Besides using its specialized units (Spetsnaz), the GRU appears to be the primary entity in creating and managing the auxiliary groups.[108] The Ukraine conflict shows that the GRU recruits criminals, political dissidents, minorities, and pro-Kremlin nationalists from among the locals in the target country.[109] When these agents are activated, they work mainly for Spetsnaz and carry out largely non-kinetic tasks, such as political agitation, to create a political situation suitable for the Russian Federation.[110]

The GRU is also closely connected with Russian private military companies (PMC), whose activities and operations abroad are growing and becoming more frequent. An analysis by Johns Hopkins University states, "Open-source analysis performed and published by Bellingcat on the role of the Russian Federation in Donbas—supported by public interviews given by separatist leaders, intelligence published by the Ukrainian SBU, and other open-source data—has produced the clearest public demonstration of Russian GRU command and control over Russian PMC forces operating abroad."[111]

Kiev and the Western agencies have accused both Russian services, the GRU and the FSB, of terrorism-related campaigns behind the Ukrainian lines.[112] Among Russia's special services, the GRU probably has the best technological and operational capability for conducting cyber operations.[113] The GRU demonstrated its capabilities against the

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[106] Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear?" 290.

[107] Galeotti, 286.

[108] Galeotti, 286.

[109] United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 43.

[110] United States Army Special Operations Command, 43.

[111] Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, *Russian Private Military Companies: Their Use and How to Consider Them in Operations, Competition, and Conflict* (Fort Meade, MD: Asymmetric Warfare Group, 2020): 79, https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/329271.

[112] Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear?" 286.

[113] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *Eesti Rahvusvahelises Julgeolekukeskkonnas 2018* [International Security and Estonia 2018] (Tallinn, Estonia: EFIS, 2018): 57, https://www.valisluureamet.ee/pdf/raport-2018-EST-web.pdf.

French TV network TV5Monde when the Russian "false flag" operation nearly destroyed the French network by shutting down twelve broadcasting channels in 2015.[114] The conclusion was that the GRU's aim was not an espionage attempt to steal secrets but a test of its cyber weapons and their destructivity.[115] Around 2015, Russian intelligence services modified their cyber tactics.[116] They began combining hacking and leaking, which refers to digital espionage and active measures. The GRU has set up at least six front bodies to distribute information: Yemen Cyber Army, Cyber Berkut, Guccifer 2.0, DC Leaks, Fancy Bears Hack Team, and @ANPoland.[117] More such groups have also been created, and their names may have changed over time.[118] As it is difficult to define the specific motives and other details of their activities, it is believed that the FSB rather than the GRU may be behind some groups.[119]

b.   The FSB

The FSB, a successor service of the KGB, is the primary internal security agency in Russia.[120] The head of the FSB reports directly to the Russian Federation president and holds a position equivalent to a minister.[121] The service's responsibilities cover intelligence, counterintelligence, counterterrorism, border protection, fighting organized crime, and ensuring information security.[122] The FSB is experienced in cooperating with

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[114] Corera, *Russians Among Us*, 348–350.

[115] Corera, 348–350.

[116] Disinformation: A Primer in Russian Active Measures and Influence Campaigns: Hearings before the Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate, 115th Cong. (2017): 3, https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/documents/os-trid-033017.pdf.

[117] Select Committee on Intelligence United States Senate, *Disinformation*, 3–4.

[118] "Alert (AA20-296A) - Russian State-Sponsored Advanced Persistent Threat Actor Compromises U.S. Government Targets," Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, October 22, 2020, https://us-cert.cisa.gov/ncas/alerts/aa20-296a.

[119] David E. Sanger and Nicole Perlroth, "As Election Nears, Government and Tech Firms Push Back on Russia (and Trump)," *New York Times*, October 22, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/20/us/politics/election-hacking-trump-microsoft-cyber-command.html.

[120] Andrew Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military: Russia's Ground Combat Capabilities and Implications for U.S.-Russia Competition - Appendixes* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND 2019): 215, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR3099.html.

[121] Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military*, 215.

[122] Radin et al., 215.

proxy forces and groups—together with the (Russian) Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), they were the leading agencies that directed proxy forces in the Second Chechen War (1999–2009).[123] Similarly to the GRU, the FSB also actively runs and commands the activities of proxies today. The FSB, considered as the primary domestic security agency, has also been associated with international organized crime[124] and actively conducting psychological and information operations abroad.[125] The FSB is known to run a variety of so-called political "active measures," from using proxies and agents to spread misinformation to attempting to corrupt and influence Western politicians.[126] Tomáš Čižik argues that separatists in eastern Ukraine, equipped with modern Russian military equipment, have apparent links with the FSB.[127] Russian intelligence agencies have invested heavily in influence agents, whose mission abroad is not to steal secrets but to provoke unrest and discontent to turn the populace against their government.[128]

The FSB covers its cyber-attacks by exploiting and managing autonomous hackers and using its high-end cyber-espionage capabilities.[129] For example, "the Russian Business Network (RBN), a cyber-criminal organization active since 1996, was founded by individuals with direct connections to the Russian military and the FSB."[130] The RBN's founder, known as "Flyman" is a relative of some of St. Petersburg's political members, the same network of officials that gave rise to President Putin.[131] Others who formed the

[123] United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 12–13.

[124] Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear?" 290.

[125] Rusnáková, "Russian New Art of Hybrid Warfare in Ukraine," 364.

[126] Galeotti, 290.

[127] Tomáš Čižik, "Baltic States - How to React to "New Warfare" in the Context of the Article V?" *Slovak Journal of Political Sciences* 17, no. 2 (2017): 190, DOI: 10.1515/sjps-2017-0008.

[128] Corera, *Russians Among Us,* 358, 361–362.

[129] Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear?" 286.

[130] Brandon Valeriano, Benjamin Jensen, and Ryan C. Maness, *Cyber Strategy: The Evolving Character of Power and Coercion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018), 116.

[131] Peter Warren, "Hunt for Russia's Web Criminals," *Guardian*, November 15, 2007, https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2007/nov/15/news.crime; Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, *Cyber Strategy*, 116.

RBN were former members of the FSB.[132] The most sophisticated cyber espionage is not conducted by criminal hackers but by the FSB's elite hacker unit, code-named "Turla," the successor to the KGB signal intelligence unit acquired by the FSB.[133] This unit is known as a highly advanced and stealthy cyber-espionage player that, among other tasks, conducted the "Buckshot Yankee" breaching operation against the U.S. military in 2008.[134] Over time the group has also been identified using names such as Snake, Uroburos, VENEMOUS BEAR, or Waterbug.[135] Having a global grasp, the group has also more recently breached into embassies, foreign affairs ministries, and other government agencies across Europe and former Soviet republics.[136] In Russia's cyber operations and strategy against the West, intelligence agencies are likely to be forced to cooperate, especially if the target is a strong and powerful adversary such as the United States or a group of countries. Given its role in the hacking and leaking tactics that started in 2015, Turla is likely to play a vital role by covering a portion of the hacking part.

c.   The SVR

The SVR's main task has traditionally been to gather foreign intelligence on topics such as the economy, technology, and defense to support Russian state-level decision-making, using human intelligence (HUMINT) case officers both under diplomatic cover and covert operatives under the code name 'illegals.'[137] The GRU uses a similar *modus*

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[132] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, *Cyber Strategy*, 116.

[133] Corera, 346.

[134] Corera, 346.

[135] "NSA and NCSC Release Joint Advisory on Turla Group Activity," Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, October 23, 2019, https://us-cert.cisa.gov/ncas/current-activity/2019/10/21/nsa-and-ncsc-release-joint-advisory-turla-group-activity.

[136] Symantec DeepSight Adversary Intelligence Team and Network Protection Security Labs, "Waterbug: Espionage Group Rolls Out Brand-New Toolset in Attacks Against Governments," *Symantec Enterprise Blogs*, June 20, 2019, https://symantec-enterprise-blogs.security.com/blogs/threat-intelligence/waterbug-espionage-governments; Sean Lyngaas, "Why, and How, Turla Spies Keep Returning to European Government Networks," CyberScoop, last modified October 28, 2020, https://www.cyberscoop.com/turla-accenture-russia-europe-espionage/.

[137] Sandor Fabian, "The Russian Hybrid Warfare Strategy – Neither Russian Nor Strategy," *Defense and Security Analysis* 35, no. 3 (2019): 317–318, https://doi.org/10.1080/14751798.2019.1640424; Galeotti, *Putin's Hydra*, 2.

operandi, and one of their main tasks is to gather foreign intelligence,[138] but the GRU's focus is more military-specific. Nevertheless, the SVR is very actively, together and in parallel with the GRU and the FSB, supporting European organizations that include environmental movements, nationalist and anti-governmental political groups, Russian diaspora campaigns in the Baltics, and separatists from South to North.[139]

Even though the SVR is principally concentrating on HUMINT, it also holds the capacities to carry out signals intelligence (SIGINT) and wiretapping on fixed and wireless lines.[140] Many recent investigations reveal that in Ukraine, the SVR, concurrently with the FSB, has been heavily deploying its special groups to the region, and indirectly organizing separatists' actions, conducting information campaigns, cyber-attacks, and providing intelligence.[141] The U.S. Department of State's Global Engagement Center (GEC) reported in August 2020 that the SVR manages an online journal, *The Strategic Culture Foundation*, which holds a central position in a group of associated websites that disseminate Russian disinformation and propaganda.[142] According to the GEC, the journal "is a prime example of long-standing Russian tactics to conceal direct state involvement in disinformation and propaganda outlets, and to cultivate local voices to serve as surrogate messengers."[143]

2.   Russian-Backed Non-violent Non-state Actors

Cyberspace has made it possible to adopt handy, more accessible, and faster tactics to gain a strategic advantage in warfare.[144] In cyberspace, the winners are not the countries

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[138] Galeotti, 2.

[139] Galeotti, 7.

[140] Fabian, "The Russian Hybrid Warfare Strategy," 317–318.

[141] Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military*, 209.

[142] Global Engagement Center, *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, GEC Special Report (U.S. Department of State, 2020): 14, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf.

[143] Global Engagement Center, *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, 14.

[144] Monica M. Ruiz, "Venemaa Infooperatsioonide Mõju: Tehnilised ja Psühholoogilised Taotlused" [Impact of Russian Information Operations: Technical and Psychological Endeavors], *Diplomaatia* [Diplomacy], October 24, 2017, https://diplomaatia.ee/venemaa-infooperatsioonide-moju-tehnilised-ja-psuhholoogilised-taotlused/.

with better technology.[145] They are the ones who can effectively combine the various cyber-elements, and gradually develop these elements to achieve strategic goals effectively.[146] "Russia's approach to cyber operations is divided into two: information-technical, which overlaps with the Western definition of electronic and cyber-warfare and focuses on technical capability; and information-psychological, reminiscent of Western strategic communication and psychological operations, which focus on influence operations."[147]

Information operations are a mixture of propaganda, disinformation, diplomatic ambiguity, manipulation of the press, and outright falsehoods designed to confuse, produce discontent, and divide the public and government in the country of destination and elsewhere.[148] Psychological operations use Russian-controlled media and agents to create a narrative in favor of the Kremlin, to incite subversion of the target population through so-called controlled chaos, and to intimidate civilian support networks, such as military counterparts.[149]

Notably, Russian peacetime and wartime cyber strategies are similar.[150] In peacetime, Russia's intention is to isolate the targets, change opinions with disinformation and propaganda, and weaken rivals internally.[151] Russia's cyber actions in Georgia and Ukraine showed that its cyber strategy supports the wider hostile campaign only minimally in conflict.[152] Cyber-attacks and other malign activities in cyberspace have been effectively used against Russia's neighbors, such as: Estonia (2007); Lithuania (2008);

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[145] Ruiz, "Impact of Russian Information Operations: Technical and Psychological Endeavors."

[146] Ruiz.

[147] Ruiz.

[148] Weitz, "Facing Russia's Hybrid Threats."

[149] Weitz; Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, *Cyber Strategy*, 110–113.

[150] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 111.

[151] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 111.

[152] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 111.

Georgia (2008);[153] Ukraine, more precisely in Crimea (2014); and also against the United States (2016) and France (2017).[154]

Russia's cyber apparatus is intertwined with a vast criminal web that creates a synergy between the cyber-criminal underworld and the Russian security agencies and other entities part of cyber operations.[155] Russia's special services use cybercriminals and so-called patriotic hackers to cover up their activities more effectively,[156] and keep capabilities improvement costs more favorable.[157] Cybercriminals are mainly used for espionage and data collection to carry out further operations.[158] Patriotic hackers are seemingly unrelated to the state's interests and special services but regularly activate during a military or a geopolitical conflict in which Russia's interests are at stake.[159] Their main activities are website breaches, denial of service attacks, and spreading misinformation to disturb the state and society's essential services.[160] So far, Moscow's pattern of cyber-attacks shows three waves: before the conflict, it delegitimizes and disorients the target; in conflict, the cyber activity supports kinetic operations; and after the first phase of combat, it creates, in cooperation with systematic active measures, the disorder that attempts to fracture the legitimacy of the state victim.[161]

Although the cybersphere plays an essential role in Russia's propaganda and disinformation campaigns, the U.S. State Department's GEC states that it is only one of the five principal pillars of Russia's so-called disinformation and propaganda

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[153] Eneken Tikk, Kadri Kaska, and Liis Vihul, *International Cyber Incidents – Legal Considerations* (Tallinn, Estonia: Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2010): 14, 50, 66, https://ccdcoe.org/uploads/2018/10/legalconsiderations_0.pdf.

[154] Ruiz, " Impact of Russian Information Operations: Technical and Psychological Endeavors."

[155] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 112, 115.

[156] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *Eesti Rahvusvahelises Julgeolekukeskkonnas 2019* [International Security and Estonia 2019] (Tallinn, Estonia: EFIS, 2019): 48–52, https://www.valisluureamet.ee/pdf/raport-2019-EST-web.pdf.

[157] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, 112.

[158] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2019*, 48–52.

[159] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2019*, 52–53.

[160] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 53.

[161] Valeriano, Jensen, and Maness, *Cyber Strategy*, 142.

ecosystem.[162] This "ecosystem" is "the collection of official, proxy, and unattributed communication channels and platforms that Russia uses to create and amplify false narratives."[163]

Besides cyberspace, the other four pillars are formal government communications, state-funded worldwide messaging, cultivation of proxy sources, and arming of social media.[164] Official government communication is the most overt and consists of statements of the Kremlin or ministries, formal Russian media reports, and comments and quotes by Russian officials.[165] State-funded global messaging relies on Russian-funded foreign-oriented media; Russian internal media; international, but Russian-funded media; and international Russian socio-cultural organizations.[166]

Proxy sources add Russian-linked outlets with global grasp, local language-specific outlets, deliberate and unwitting distributors of Kremlin narratives, and foreign narrative amplifications.[167] Social media's weaponization covers the infiltration of domestic conversations, campaigns to undermine people's trust in institutions, and elaboration of target-state protests or civil disputes.[168] Finally, cyber-enabled disinformation is the most covert and deals with hacking and releasing, website captures, cloning sites, forgeries, and meddling with official sources or objective media.[169]

3.   Russian-Backed Violent Non-State Actors

Indirect forces are the vital tools Russia uses to exploit the existing vulnerabilities or attempts to destabilize the target state while creating vulnerabilities.[170] These indirect

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[162] Global Engagement Center, *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, 3.

[163] Global Engagement Center, 3.

[164] Global Engagement Center, 3.

[165] Global Engagement Center, 8.

[166] Global Engagement Center, 8.

[167] Global Engagement Center, *Pillars of Russia's Disinformation and Propaganda Ecosystem*, 8.

[168] Global Engagement Center, 8.

[169] Global Engagement Center, 8.

[170] Rauta, "Towards a Typology of Non-State Actors in 'Hybrid Warfare,'" 1.

actors are commonly called proxies, but Vladimir Rauta has gone into specifics and divides these indirect elements into separate categories: affiliates, auxiliaries, and proxies.[171] In addition, Russian transnational criminal organizations are another indirect force. Every type of indirect force has its role in sabotaging and fighting the target state, its security forces, and government.[172]

a. *Affiliates*

Affiliates are described as armed formations that are informally part of the state's troops and, while being external actors, aim to change the strategic outcome of the conflict in favor of the state.[173] Affiliated groups possess "a symbiotic, formal, yet legally dubious relationship with the state acting as an invisible arm."[174] These can be mercenaries grouped and formed into private or contract armies capable of independent military campaigns, attack operations, and projection of force[175] or shadowy private companies that provide their clients with versatile options of military and security services.[176] In Ukraine, the majority of affiliated forces activities have been related to the Wagner Group, a firm of mercenaries veiled in secrecy that is now active also in other regions, such as Syria, Sudan, Libya, the Central African Republic, and Venezuela among others.[177] PMCs offer Russia the opportunity to project power abroad cheaply and deniably, and Russia is increasingly using this easily scalable capability.[178] Russia uses these groups as force multipliers to

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[171] Rauta, 7–8.

[172] Rauta, 3, 7.

[173] Rauta, 11–12.

[174] Rauta, 12.

[175] Sean McFate, *The Modern Mercenary: Private Armies and What They Mean for World Order* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 14.

[176] Peter W. Singer, *Corporate Warriors: The Rise of the Privatized Military Industry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 8.

[177] Ellen Ioanes, "These Are the Countries Where Russia's Shadowy Wagner Group Mercenaries Operate," Business Insider, last modified November 19, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/russia-wagner-group-mercenaries-where-operate-2018-4; Neil Hauer, "The Rise and Fall of a Russian Mercenary Army," Foreign Policy, last modified October 6, 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/10/06/rise-fall-russian-private-army-wagner-syrian-civil-war/.

[178] Andrew S. Bowen, *Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs)*, CRS Report No. IF11650 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2020), https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/IF11650.pdf.

fulfill its national and Russian-related private interests in the target country or region for the lowest possible political and military cost.[179] PMCs can be quickly sent into and brought back from a conflict or area of interest, and often they operate there in collaboration with other non-state actors and local groups.[180] Also, PMCs' use is beneficial for Russia because, compared to reports of soldiers killed and injured in foreign operations, the news of PMC members' casualties do not have as much impact and are more easily suppressed in Russia.[181] Yet, Moscow must carefully manage the PMCs' activities, as losing control of their actions could create a situation in the target country that is not in line with Russia's goals.[182]

b.   *Auxiliaries*

Auxiliaries are armed groups formed from volunteers who do not belong to regular forces but are directly participating in the operating environment in collaboration with or beside military troops deployed to the target state.[183] They therefore "act as force multipliers, in defensive or offensive roles, accompanying or being accompanied by regulars in operation."[184] In Crimea, the auxiliaries committed to diverse activities from creating and taking part in pro-Kremlin protests to road blocking and other attempts to support the invading unmarked Russian units and enforce the peninsula's occupation.[185] In the kinetic operations of the campaign, local self-defense groups accompanied the Russian Spetsnaz units, and the former can be identified as auxiliaries.[186] In Crimea, many auxiliaries had a criminal background because the peninsula "has a long history of

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[179] Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, *Russian Private Military Companies*, IX.

[180] Bowen, *Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs)*.

[181] Nils Dahlqvist, *Russia's (Not So) Private Military Companies*, FOI Memo 6653 - Project No: A19101 (Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Defence Research Agency, 2019), https://www.foi.se/rapportsammanfattning?reportNo=FOI%20MEMO%206653.

[182] Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, *Russian Private Military Companies*, IX.

[183] Rauta, "Towards a Typology of Non-State Actors in 'Hybrid Warfare,'" 10.

[184] Rauta, 10.

[185] Rauta, 10.

[186] Rauta, 10; Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear?" 284–295.

criminality, turf wars and gangs."[187] In the operations, they were military auxiliaries who carried out Russia's goals.[188] Russia funds and supports the various military, shooting, martial arts, and history organizations and clubs in several European countries.[189] And "it has been thoroughly reported in the media that Russia sponsors numerous tactical training organizations in the Baltic States and the Balkans including paintball, airsoft, and knife fighting clubs to recruit and exert influence."[190] For example, in Estonia and Latvia, instructors with a background in the Russian military and even special units have taught tactics in various Russian-language clubs, which have been described by observers as "small unit tactics".[191]

c. *Proxy Forces*

Proxies are "third party forces that are employed by a state in any external conflict where the employment of its own forces may be deemed undesirable."[192] These are "armed groups that are not part of regular forces but that fight for and on behalf of states wishing to alter the strategic outcome of a conflict while remaining external to it. The proxy is indirectly embedded with the external state in as much as it becomes their conduit of armed violence on the basis of the state's provision of a range of support."[193] In this thesis, the author considers a proxy as a group with a grievance against another group, so its interests align with the state sponsor. Therefore, the proxies can be ideologically supportive of the sponsoring state, but the main reason for involvement in struggle or conflict is not for financial profit, as affiliates, or for ideology, as auxiliaries, but for their own interests. In the case of the Ukrainian crises, proxies are used in eastern Ukraine, where the aim was to

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[187] Rauta, 10.

[188] Rauta, 10.

[189] John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, "Russia - Regional Threat Overview," *Special Warfare* 32, no. 3 (2019): 10, ProQuest.

[190] John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, "Russia - Regional Threat Overview," 10.

[191] Anne Applebaum, "Airsoft Guns and Hard Power," *Washington Post*, January 19, 2018, ProQuest.

[192] Geraint Hughes and Christian Tripodi, "Anatomy of a Surrogate: Historical Precedents and Implications for Contemporary Counter-Insurgency and Counter-Terrorism," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20, no. 1 (2009): 3, https://doi-org.libproxy.nps.edu/10.1080/09592310802571552.

[193] Rauta, "Towards a Typology of Non-State Actors in 'Hybrid Warfare,'" 11.

create a frozen conflict, as opposed to Crimea, which was occupied and merged into Russia.[194] The proxy forces' role has turned out to be not just military as it was with the auxiliaries in the Crimea, but a much larger political and strategic one.[195]

d.   *Organized Crime*

The relationship between the Russian state's highest echelons and organized crime is very different from the West.[196] Organized crime is used both overtly and covertly to realize Moscow's foreign policy goals abroad.[197] In Europe, organized crime groups linked with Russia "have been used for a variety of purposes, including as sources of "black cash," to launch cyber-attacks, to traffic people and goods, and even to carry out targeted assassinations on behalf of the Kremlin."[198]

Criminal networks perform even the duties typically considered as government functions, such as intelligence operations and political influence.[199] For example, despite having similar criminal roots to their Western counterparts such as Hells Angels MC and Bandidos MC, the Russian Night Wolves Motorcycle Club (NWMC) has become a Russian state tool uniting battle-ready diasporas abroad.[200] The NWMC closely cooperates with the Russian military and uses its corporate entity to spread propaganda and provide military-style training to countrymen living outside Russia.[201] The NWMC is represented

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[194] Rauta, 10.

[195] Vladimir Rauta, "Proxy Agents, Auxiliary Forces, and Sovereign Defection: Assessing the Outcomes of Using Non-State Actors in Civil Conflicts," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 16, no. 1 (2016): 104–105, https://doi.org/10.1080/14683857.2016.1148416.

[196] Kira Harris, "Russia's Fifth Column: The Influence of the Night Wolves Motorcycle Club," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 43, no. 4 (2020): 259, https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2018.1455373.

[197] Mark Galeotti, *Crimintern: How the Kremlin Uses Russia's Criminal Networks in Europe*, Policy Brief No. 208 (London, UK: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/crimintern_how_the_kremlin_uses_russias_criminal_networks_in_europe; Harris, "Russia's Fifth Column: The Influence of the Night Wolves Motorcycle Club," 259.

[198] Galeotti, *Crimintern: How the Kremlin Uses Russia's Criminal Networks in Europe*.

[199] Galeotti.

[200] Harris, "Russia's Fifth Column," 259.

[201] Harris, 259.

in Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Latvia, Serbia, Macedonia, Romania, Bulgaria, and Germany.[202]

Domestically, Russian authorities are fighting against militant nationalists, but they support, both overtly and covertly, radical right-wing organizations in several European countries and North America.[203] This gives Russia the opportunity, through local anti-regime groups, to undermine its opponents and put these right-wing networks in a position where they can be used to spread propaganda and later, if necessary, carry out destructive subversion.[204] Russian intelligence agencies routinely use the criminal underworld to perform their tasks and use these networks both in the cases of unarmed and in more violent situations,[205] and this applies especially in Ukraine, where the criminals are acting not only as collaborators but also as combatants.[206]

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[202] United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 44.

[203] Jan Holzer, Martin Laryš, and Miroslav Mareš, *Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin's Russia: Legacies, Forms and Threats* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 209.

[204] Holzer, Laryš, and Mareš, *Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin's Russia*, 209.

[205] Hoffman, "Examining Complex Forms of Conflict: Gray Zone and Hybrid Challenges," 40.

[206] Mark Galeotti, *The Vory. Russia's Super Mafia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018), 243.

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III. ESTONIA

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a case study of Estonia, a small post-Soviet country in Eastern Europe. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 Estonia became independent and a part of Western society. It has been a member of NATO since March 2004 and of the EU since May of the same year.[207] Estonia is one of the three Baltic states located in the so-called near-abroad of the Russian Federation. Russia continues to be interested in influencing the processes taking place in Estonia and its relations with Western partners.[208]

The second section of this chapter introduces the reader to Estonia's geographical location and briefly describes the state structure and the economic situation. This is followed by a description of Estonia's historical ties with Russia, as they continue to influence events in Estonia. The most influential and clearest Russian NTW campaign against Estonia to date was the 2007 Bronze Soldier riots. To understand the reasons for the unrest and the evolution of events in 2007, it is essential to describe the historical relations of Estonia and its population with the Russian Federation, and the differences of opinion in interpreting the history of Estonia.

The third section describes the Bronze Soldier events in April 2007 and the first-ever anti-state cyber-attacks from April to May. First, the section describes the immediate circumstances and environment that led to the unrest in Estonian society. This is followed by a description of the events, which were street riots lasting three to four days and cyber-attacks against Estonia that started simultaneously but lasted for three weeks. There is also a description of the Estonian embassy's besiegement, which happened in Moscow and lasted for a week simultaneously with the street riots and cyber-attacks. This activity was

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207 "Eesti" [Estonia], Euroopa Liit [European Union], July 30, 2020, https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/countries/member-countries/estonia_et; "Eesti ja NATO" [Estonia and NATO], Välisministeerium [Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs], July 14, 2020, https://vm.ee/et/eesti-ja-nato.

208 Andrew Radin, Alyssa Demus, and Krystyna Marcinek, *Understanding Russian Subversion: Patterns, Threats, and Responses*, (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 4–5, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/perspectives/PE300/PE331/RAND_PE331.pdf.

a severe violation of international diplomatic rules and was part of the political pressure in Russia's attack on Estonia.

The fourth section analyzes which non-state actors, previously described in Chapter II, Russia used in the Bronze Soldier affair. Following the example of Chapter II, the analysis is divided into parts based on the actors. First, the actor-based analysis shows their activities before and in 2007, how they were connected to the Russian government or its state actors, and the consequences of those activities. In the same actor-based parts, the author then examines how Russia has tried to use these non-state actors in Estonia and against Estonia after 2007.

The last section of the chapter summarizes the use of non-state actors and concludes that Russia's actions against Estonia in 2007 were ultimately a failure, but nevertheless, it continues its activities against Estonia with similar approaches. The section suggests why the Bronze Soldier case did not evolve into a statewide long-term crisis and which actors Russia continues to prepare and possibly plans to use if new NTW campaigns should occur in Estonia again.

B.   ESTONIA'S GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION AND POPULATION, STATE STRUCTURE, AND ECONOMY

The Republic of Estonia, a small Eastern European country that borders the Baltic Sea and the Gulf of Finland, is located between Latvia and the Russian Federation.[209] Together with the Latvian and the Lithuanian Republics, it forms the Baltic states. Estonia's closest neighbors are also the Republic of Finland, approximately 80 kilometers (50 miles) north across the Gulf of Finland, and the Kingdom of Sweden, about 400 kilometers (250 miles) northwest across the Baltic Sea. Estonia has a population of just over 1.3 million people, 68 percent of whom are Estonians, 25 percent Russians, 6 percent

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[209] "The World Factbook. Europe: Estonia," Central Intelligence Agency, November 18, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/en.html.

other nationalities such as Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Finns, and about 1 percent of the population is of unknown origin.[210]

Estonia is a parliamentary republic. The Riigikogu (Parliament) is the Estonian people's representative body, which, according to the Constitution, has legislative power.[211] A prime minister appointed by the president and approved by the Riigikogu heads its government.[212] The prime minister is responsible for exercising the executive power given to the government, but the head of state is the president, elected by the Riigikogu or the electoral body for five years.[213]

The most important sectors of the Estonian economy are wholesale and retail trade, transport, accommodation and food service activities, industry and public administration, national defense, education and health, and social work.[214] Intra-EU trade accounts for 68 percent of Estonia's exports, while outside the EU, 6 percent goes to both the United States and Russia. Seventy-seven percent of imports come from EU member states; while outside the EU, 9 percent comes from Russia and 4 percent from China.[215] The fact that approximately three quarters of trade is conducted within the EU and with the United States shows that Estonia is fully integrated into Europe and Western community.

C.   HISTORICAL FACTORS THAT CREATED THE PRECONDITIONS FOR THE BRONZE SOLDIER INCIDENT

Historically, Estonia has been a battleground for neighboring and larger countries. After being ruled successively for centuries by Denmark, Sweden, and Germany, Estonia was part of the Russian Empire for nearly two centuries.[216] This rule was followed by a

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[210] "Rahvastik: Demograafia, Rahvastik, Inimesed, Inimene, Iive" [Population: Demography, Population, People, Person, Birth Rate], Statistikaamet [Statistics Estonia], accessed November 23, 2020, https://www.stat.ee/et/avasta-statistikat/valdkonnad/rahvastik.

[211] Riigikogu Kantselei [Chancellery of the Riigikogu], "Riigikogu" [Parliament], Eesti riigiportaal [State portal], last modified November 23, 2020, https://www.eesti.ee/et/eesti-vabariik/riigikogu/.

[212] European Union, "Estonia."

[213] European Union.

[214] European Union.

[215] European Union.

[216] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook. Europe: Estonia."

year of the German Empire's occupation, after which Estonia attained *de facto* independence at the end of the First World War.[217] From 1918 to 1920, Estonian defense forces, in the War of Independence, faced the invading Red Army that was followed by German troops posted in Latvia.[218] Estonia lost more than six thousand soldiers in the War of Independence, but won the war after concluding the Tartu Peace Treaty. Despite a Soviet-backed coup attempt in 1924, Estonia maintained its freedom until 1940.[219] That attempt began in the early morning of December 1, 1924, when strike groups sent from the Soviet Union, together with underground Estonian communists, attempted to overthrow the Estonian government, seize power, and then call in the regular Red Army troops for help.[220] The aim was to establish a communist regime in Estonia and to unite it with the Soviet Union, but the Estonian government declared a state of war and the coup attempt was suppressed on the same day.[221]

In the twentieth century, Estonia found itself at the crossroads of power struggles between great powers. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, signed in August 1939 by Hitler and Stalin, resulted in Eastern Europe's distribution between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Consequently, Estonia lost its independence once more and was forcibly incorporated into the Soviet Union in 1940.[222] The following year, 1941, the Soviet Union started mass deportations (there were more to follow in 1949), and more than ten thousand Estonians—from a total population of 1.1 million—were taken to Siberian death camps

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[217] Peeter Kaasik et al., *Eesti Vabadussõja Ajalugu II: Kaitsesõda Piiride Taga ja Lõpuvõitlused* [History of the Estonian War of Independence II: Defense War Beyond Borders and Final Fights] (Tallinn, Estonia: Varrak, 2020), 488.

[218] Kaasik et al., *History of the Estonian War of Independence II: Defense War Beyond Borders and Final Fights*, 488.

[219] Kaasik et al., 488; Toomas Hiio, "Eesti Mehed Nõukogude ja Saksa Väes" [Estonian Men in Soviet and German Forces], *Eesti Päevaleht* [Estonian Daily Newspaper]*,* June 21, 2007, https://epl.delfi.ee/meelelahutus/eesti-mehed-noukogude-ja-saksa-vaes?id=51091892.

[220] Toomas Hiio, "1924. a 1. Detsembri Kommunistlik Putšikatse" [December 1, 1924, Communist Coup Attempt], Estonica, last modified April 30, 2010, http://www.estonica.org/et/ 1924_a_1_detsembri_kommunistlik_put%C5%A1ikatse/.

[221] Hiio, "December 1, 1924, Communist Coup Attempt."

[222] Hiio, "Estonian Men in Soviet and German Forces"; Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook. Europe: Estonia."

where the majority either perished or were executed.[223] In the vision of the Soviet leadership, the future front line had to be cleansed of a "socially foreign element," though no one was convicted in court; merely a presumption of anti-regime sentiment was enough to be deported.[224]

During the Second World War, the occupying forces changed on Estonia's territory from Soviets to Nazis, and in this time frame, both mobilized in total about a hundred thousand Estonians out of a 1.1 million population into their troops.[225] About one-third ended up fighting for the Soviet forces and two-thirds fighting for the Germans.[226] The fact that a number of Estonians fought on the German side is used as a tool for contemporary Russian propaganda to label Estonians either Nazis or Fascists.

About a year before the end of the war, in September 1944, when German troops were forced to withdraw from Estonian territory, Estonia tried once again to regain its independence.[227] In accordance with the pre-war 1937 Constitution, a new government was quickly convened, and the Estonian national flag was hoisted on the roof of the pre-war parliament building in the capital, Tallinn.[228] A few days later, a new wave of Red Army troops arrived in the capital, replaced the Estonian flag with the Soviet Union's and arrested the new government's representatives.[229] With this, Estonia was conclusively incorporated into the Soviet Union. After that, Soviet authorities and troops remained in Estonia for the next fifty years.[230] Estonians did not readily submit to the new Soviet order.

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[223] "14. Juunil 1941 Küüditati Eestist Siberisse Üle 10 000 Inimese" [On June 14, 1941, More than 10,000 People Were Deported from Estonia to Siberia], *Tartu Postimees*, June 14, 2011, https://tartu.postimees.ee/469556/14-juunil-1941-kuuditati-eestist-siberisse-ule-10-000-inimese; Mare Ainsaar, *Eesti Rahvastik – Taani Hindamisraamatust Tänapäevani. Estonian Population – from Liber Census Daniae up to Nowadays* (Tartu, Estonia: Tartu Ülikooli Kirjastus, 1997), 45.

[224] *Tartu Postimees*, "14. juunil 1941."

[225] Hiio, "Estonian Men in Soviet and German Forces."

[226] Hiio.

[227] Toomas Hiio, "Attempt to Restore Estonian Independence in 1944," Estonica, last modified September 28, 2012, http://www.estonica.org/en/Attempt_to_restore_Estonian_independence_in_1944/.

[228] Hiio, "Attempt to Restore Estonian Independence in 1944."

[229] Hiio.

[230] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 7.

A national resistance movement emerged among the people, the Forest Brotherhood, which sought not to allow the Soviet leadership to impose power freely.

At the end of March 1949, the Soviet authorities began another deportation operation, during which more than twenty thousand people were deported from Estonia to Siberia.[231] Its primary aim was to complete the collectivization that had begun in 1947, which had not succeeded through economic pressure alone.[232] The main culprits were considered to be better-off farmers and their families, who did not want to join the collective farm or give up land, livestock, and inventory owned within the family for several generations.[233] Secondly, the aim was to suppress the Forest Brotherhood, which supported many people's hopes and beliefs that Soviet power in Estonia would soon run out.[234] As a result of wars and two mass deportations in 1941 and 1949, Estonia had lost a significant part of its population.

From the beginning of the 1950s, many non-Estonians from other Soviet territories, such as Pskov, St. Petersburg, Novgorod Oblast, and Central Russia, began to arrive or were resettled by the Soviet authorities in Estonia.[235] During the Khrushchev era, the Soviet regime released the deported Estonians from "special residence" in Siberia.[236] In total, of those deported in 1949, about 15 percent perished.[237] As a result of these changes, the ratio and importance of Estonians in their "Sovietized" homeland decreased.[238] The

[231] Aigi Rahi-Tamm, "1949. a Märtsiküüditamine" [Deportation in March 1949], Estonica, last modified February 14, 2010, http://www.estonica.org/et/ 1949_a_m%C3%A4rtsik%C3%BC%C3%BCditamine/.

[232] Rahi-Tamm, "Deportation in March 1949."

[233] Toomas Hiio, "Terroriaktsioon, Mis Muutis Eesti: 1949. Aasta Märtsiküüditamine" [The Act of Terror that Changed Estonia: The Deportation in March 1949], Communist Crimes, June 17, 2019, https://communistcrimes.org/et/terroriaktsioon-mis-muutis-eesti-1949-aasta-martsikuuditamine.

[234] Hiio, "The Act of Terrorism that Changed Estonia."

[235] Ainsaar, *Estonian Population*, 56.

[236] Rahi-Tamm.

[237] Rahi-Tamm.

[238] Ainsaar, 56.

1989 census showed that nearly 26 percent of the Estonian population had been born outside Estonia, one of Europe's largest figures at the time.[239]

A few years before the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, peaceful anti-Soviet and pro-independence movements began to emerge in the Baltics. These culminated in 1989 with the forming of a 600-kilometer (372 miles) human chain from Tallinn, the capital of Estonia, through the Latvian capital of Riga to Vilnius, the Lithuanian capital.[240] This event marked the Molotov−Ribbentrop Pact's fiftieth anniversary and attempted to draw attention to the Baltic states' fate.[241] Estonia, together with other Baltic states, regained its independence in 1991 with the break-up of the Soviet Union, but the withdrawal of troops took a few more years, and the last Russian units left Estonia in 1994.[242] The most important events of the twentieth century that influenced Estonia's independence, people, and statehood are illustrated in Figure 1.

[239] Ainsaar, *Estonian Population*, 56.

[240] "History," Baltic Way, December 5, 2020, http://www.thebalticway.eu/en/history/.

[241] Baltic Way, "History."

[242] Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook. Europe: Estonia."
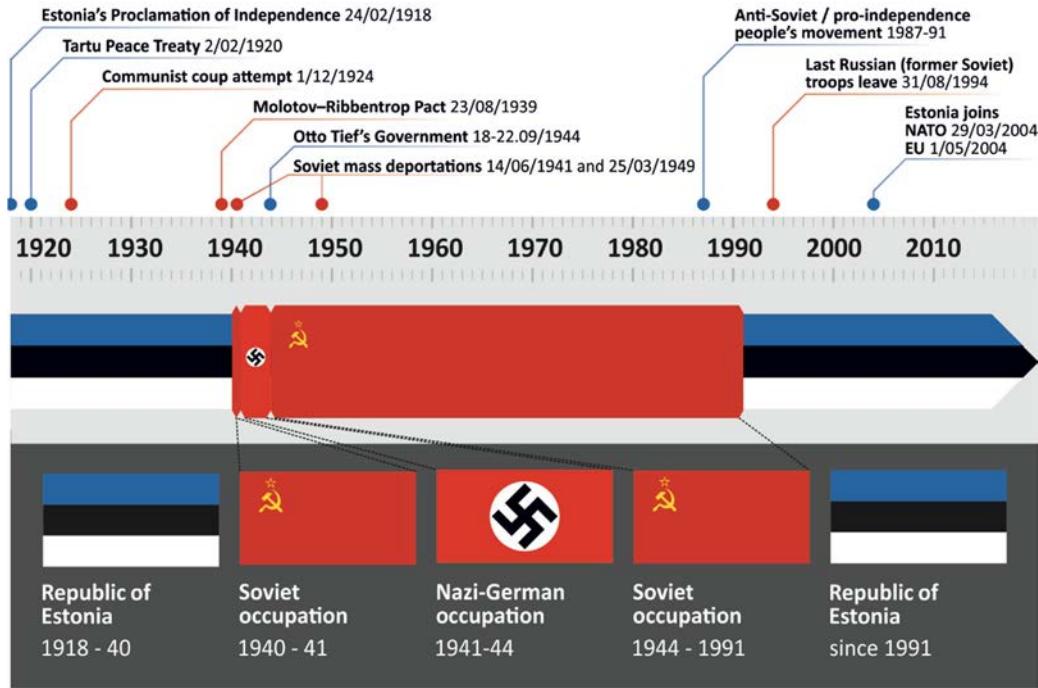
Figure 1.   The events that most affected Estonia in the twentieth century.[243]

1.   The Historical Memory of Estonia and Russia

Estonia and Russia disagree on the Soviet history of the 1940–41 and 1944–91 periods in Estonia.[244] The Russian Federation sees its actions during these periods, or at least officially interprets them, as liberation, while the Estonian side is firmly convinced that the Soviet Union occupied the country.[245] At the international level, the European Court of Human Rights stated in 2006 that, "After the German occupation in 1941–44, Estonia remained occupied by the Soviet Union until the restoration of its independence in 1991."[246] "Soviet rule brought with it three important things that are still vividly remembered in Estonia: mass repressions, poverty and changes in the country's ethnic

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[243] Source: Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007,* 5.

[244] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 7.

[245] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 7.

[246] Kolk and Kislyiy v. Estonia, Application no. 23052/04 and 24018/04, http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/impu/kolk.html.

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composition."[247] Almost a quarter of Estonia's population today is of Russian nationality. The majority of them are ordinary and peaceful residents, whose goal is not to undermine or work against the country. At the same time, there is no consensus among ordinary Estonians and Estonian-Russians in Estonia regarding historical events.[248]

2. Estonian Citizenship Issues after Restoration of Independence

The case of the Bronze Soldier in 2007 concerned not only the interpretation of history but also the question of how some Russian speakers perceive their place or status in Estonian society.

Estonia sees its independence not as secession from the Soviet Union but as a restoration of the former pre-Soviet state.[249] Therefore, after independence was restored, Estonian citizenship was automatically granted to those who had been Estonian citizens before the country was incorporated into the Soviet Union and to their descendants as well.[250] By contrast, immigrants to Estonia during the Soviet period and their descendants were required to undergo a naturalization process in order to secure Estonian citizenship.[251]

As it stands, an applicant for citizenship must have at least eight years of legal residency in Estonia, including five as a permanent resident.[252] The person also must show proof of consistent lawful income, complete written and oral language exams, pass an Estonian constitutional competency exam, and give an oath of state allegiance.[253] In general, non-citizens living in Estonia enjoy the same rights and free access to social

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[247] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007,* 7.

[248] David J. Trimbach, "Estonian Citizenship Policy: The Restoration of a Country Leads to Statelessness for Some," *Migration Information Source*, June 1, 2017, https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/estonian-citizenship-policy-restoration-country-leads-statelessness-some.

[249] Trimbach, "Estonian Citizenship Policy."

[250] Riina Kionka and Raivo Vetik, "Estonia and the Estonians," in *The Nationalities Question in the Post-Soviet States*, ed. Graham Smith (London, UK: Longman, 1996), 142; Trimbach.

[251] Kionka and Vetik, "Estonia and the Estonians," 142; Trimbach.

[252] Trimbach.

[253] Trimbach.

protections as citizens but they cannot vote in Estonian or the EU elections unless they are EU citizens.[254] They also are restricted from becoming a political party member, working in the local public sector, or holding public office.[255]

The issue of citizenship has been topical and tense since Estonia regained its independence. It is an issue that can be debated from different perspectives and bent to suit one's particular goals. It is most often discussed in the context of ethnic Russians in Estonia, but the citizenship policy applies equally to people of all nationalities who wish to become Estonian citizens. It has not been developed separately for Russians living in Estonia. The cornerstone of the sustainability of Estonia as a small nation is the preservation of its language and identity. Therefore, language proficiency is an essential condition for becoming a citizen.

While Estonia's citizenship policy is similar to those of other states—and compared to the other EU countries, the naturalization requirements in Estonia are relatively liberal—it has created controversy and resentment.[256] Estonia's citizenship policy and its impact on Russian speakers continue to be a challenge for the country.[257] The policy creates a wedge between Estonians and Russian speakers, reinforcing a "one state-two societies" system.[258] The Russian government, as well as several international institutions such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and Human Rights Watch, has characterized Estonian citizenship policy as marginalizing or discriminatory.[259] Estonian citizenship policy as it stands has led Russian nationalists and the Russian government to regularly accuse the Estonian state of violating civil rights.

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[254] Raivo Vetik, "Citizenship, Statelessness and Belonging in Estonia," in *ECPR General Conference* (Reykjavik, Iceland: Tallinn University, 2011), 5, https://ecpr.eu/filestore/paperproposal/3e77f4ab-9a20-4440-b23c-0746c8bce314.pdf; Trimbach, "Estonian Citizenship Policy."

[255] Trimbach, "Estonian Citizenship Policy."

[256] Trimbach; Vetik, "Citizenship, Statelessness and Belonging in Estonia," 4.

[257] Trimbach.

[258] Trimbach.

[259] Trimbach.

D. THE BRONZE NIGHTS RIOTS IN 2007

The best-known case in recent history that involved the Russian Federation's use of non-state actors against Estonia is the so-called Bronze Soldier events of 2007. On April 26–29, 2007, riots took place in Tallinn and, to a lesser extent, in four towns of eastern Estonia.[260] Russian-speaking people started to violently protest against the government's decision to relocate the Second World War soldier-liberator statue and the anonymous Soviet soldiers buried in adjacent war graves from the center of the capital to the Estonian Defense Forces Cemetery.[261]

Simultaneously, Estonia was hit by cyber-attacks of Russian origin that occurred in two waves over three weeks, from April 27 to May 18.[262] This was the first time in history where the country had been the subject of cyber-attacks originating from another country that influenced its government, banks, media, and political parties.[263] The events in Estonia in 2007 were notable because the Russian Federation exploited the Russian-speaking diaspora in an EU- and NATO-member state to amplify internal tensions and combined the mobilization of this diaspora with other irregular techniques in the same campaign. Juurvee and Mattiisen conclude that, "the use of hybrid means was almost absent from Russia's public doctrinal and policy documents until 2007 when the Bronze Soldier crisis occurred in Estonia."[264]

1. Events Leading Up to the Bronze Soldier Incident

According to the Estonian Internal Security Service (EISS), in 2004, Russia's special services prepared an analytical report that provided a review of several of Russia's

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[260] Siiri Ottender-Paasma, "'AK. Nädal' Uuris, Kuivõrd Oli Politsei Pronksiöö Sündmusteks Valmis" ["AK. Week" Examined the Readiness of the Police for the Events of the Bronze Night], ERR, last modified April 30, 2017, https://www.err.ee/593048/ak-nadal-uuris-kuivord-oli-politsei-pronksioo-sundmusteks-valmis.

[261] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, IV.

[262] Aivar Pau, "11 Aastat Pronksiööde Küberrünnakutest – Meenutame, Mis Juhtus" [11 Years since Bronze Nights Cyber-attacks - Let Us Remember What Happened], *PostimeesTEHNIKA*, May 8, 2018, https://tehnika.postimees.ee/4482747/11-aastat-pronksioode-kuberrunnakutest-meenutame-mis-juhtus.

[263] Pau, "11 Years since Bronze Nights Cyber-attacks."

[264] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 4.

foreign policy directions connected with the enlargement of the EU and NATO.[265] According to the study, Russia had to continue its argumentative and offensive position towards the Baltics to prevent the emergence of anti-Russian sentiments and to ensure the rise of Russia's foreign policy authority in the world.[266] The most crucial factor was the need to better protect Russia's interests in the "near abroad."[267]

In Estonia, the Russian community and its leaders were directed and financially supported both directly from Moscow and through the Russian embassy in Estonia.[268] A few years prior to 2007, a growing number of Estonian-Russians, following the example of the Red Army veterans in Estonia, began celebrating holidays commemorating Soviet military victories more and more actively in Estonia, provoking the non-Russian Estonian public.[269]

These holidays included the May 9 anniversary of the USSR's victory in the Great Patriotic War—the name given to the Second World War in the former Soviet Union and modern Russia. Estonian-Russians annually commemorated this victory by raising the Soviet and Russian flags and military symbols next to the Bronze Soldier statue in Tallinn.[270] A similar event took also place every year on September 22, when the anniversary of the so-called Soviet liberation of Tallinn was celebrated.[271] These commemorations represented a fundamental confrontation of values between Estonians and Estonian Russian-speakers.

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[265] Kaitsepolitseiamet [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2007* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2007], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2008), 13, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[266] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2007*, 13.

[267] Estonian Internal Security Service, 13.

[268] Estonian Internal Security Service, 13.

[269] Estonian Internal Security Service, 13.

[270] Kärt Anvelt, "Pronksiöö Kronoloogia. Miks Puhkes Mäss ja Kuidas Sündis Otsus Monument Tõnismäelt Ära Viia" [Chronology of the Bronze Night. Why the Riot Broke out and How the Decision Was Made to Remove the Monument from Tõnismäe], *Delfi*, April 27, 2020, https://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/eesti/arhiivist-pronksioo-kronoloogia-miks-puhkes-mass-ja-kuidas-sundis-otsus-monument-tonismaelt-ara-viia?id=77847196.

[271] Anvelt, "Chronology of Bronze Night."

The Bronze Soldier location was increasingly becoming not a memorial to the fallen but a symbolic place to express pro-Russian opinions that were completely at odds with Estonian government policy and the meaning of the Second World War for independent Estonia as a whole.[272] The continuation of Russia's propagandistic behavior and the influence of officials, representatives of organizations, and the media intensified extremists' activities in Estonia; consequently, supporters and opponents of the Bronze Soldier emerged, and contradictions and conflicts between various parties intensified.[273]

A series of events preceding the 2007 riots took place a year prior. On May 9, 2006—sixty-one years after the end of the Second World War—an individual took the Estonian flag and an anti-Soviet poster to the Bronze Soldier's location. The poster read, "This soldier occupied our country and deported our people!"[274] At the monument, people celebrating with Soviet and Russian symbols attacked the Estonian flag and its carrier in front of television cameras, and the police had to take him away. The fact that the Estonian flag was removed while the Soviet flags and symbols remained at the scene broadened tensions in society.[275] A few days later an Estonian nationalist publicly declared that he would blow up the statue if it remained in its location. This was followed by a public meeting demanding that the Bronze Soldier monument be removed.[276] The day after the meeting, the statue was defiled with paint, prompting Russian-speaking activists in Estonia to form a Night Watch organization to "protect" the statue.[277]

2.   The Street Riots

The increase in tensions in society and the fact that the monument had become an influential political issue by that time led the Estonian government to decide that the Soviet

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[272] Anvelt, "Chronology of Bronze Night"; Ave Lepik, "Pronksiöö Ninamehed Haihtusid Venemaale" [The Leaders of the Bronze Night Disappeared to Russia], *Äripäev*, April 26, 2016, https://www.aripaev.ee/uudised/2016/04/26/pronksioo-ninamehed-haihtusid-venemaale.

[273] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2007*, 13.

[274] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 13.

[275] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 13.

[276] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 13.

[277] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 13–14.

war graves and the monument in the city center had to be relocated. The government decided that the Estonian Defense Forces military cemetery in Tallinn was a more appropriate place for the monument and memorial to the Red Army soldiers who fell in the Second World War.[278] On April 18, 2007, the Estonian Ministry of Defense announced the start of excavation work at the Bronze Soldier's site.[279]

About a week later, on April 26, 2007, as preparations for the identification of war graves started, crowds began to gather at the Bronze Soldier's site, mostly Russian-speaking and among them some Night Watch activists.[280] The Russian media was present and Dmitriy Linter, the leader of the Night Watch movement, gave an interview to the Russian television channel. Linter, who later turned out to be one of the organizers of the coming unrest, told Russian TV that a civil war was about to begin in Estonia and suggested that the world would soon see an entirely different Estonia with changed rulers.[281]

On the evening of the same day, the first attacks against the police by the crowd quickly gained momentum, and police forces soon had to start pushing violent masses away from the Bronze Soldier's site.[282] The crowd, which consisted of young Russian-speaking groups periodically shouting "Rossiya" [Russia], was diverted away, where it began the looting, destruction, and partial arson of streets, shops, and businesses in the center of Tallinn.[283] As a result of the unrest that night, a Russian citizen living in Estonia was stabbed to death in a crowd, and a number of people were injured, including police

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[278] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, IV.

[279] "Pronkssõduri Konflikti Kronoloogia" [Chronology of the Bronze Soldier Conflict], ERR, May 10, 2007, https://www.err.ee/458022/pronkssoduri-konflikti-kronoloogia.

[280] ERR, "Chronology of the Bronze Soldier Conflict"; Juurvee and Mattiisen, 19.

[281] Anvelt, "Chronology of Bronze Night."

[282] Endel Kasterpalu, "Vaata Pronksiöö Sündmuste Videosimulatsiooni" [Watch a Video Simulation of Bronze Night Events], *Postimees*, April 26, 2017, https://www.postimees.ee/4093083/vaata-pronksioo-sundmuste-videosimulatsiooni.

[283] Kasterpalu, " Watch a Video Simulation of Bronze Night Events"; Juurvee and Mattiisen, 21.

officers.[284] The killing of the Russian citizen was followed by fierce Russian propaganda and a series of fake news reports that tried to discredit the Estonian authorities and investigative institutions.[285] For example, President Putin, upon learning of the incident, said, "The point is not that there was an accident. We are worried about something else: that the person was not helped when he was wounded," and later declared that the Russian was dying in front of the Estonian police, and it was a "deliberate crime."[286] The Russian news agency ITAR-TASS published fake news, claiming that, "the police beat him with truncheons, he was then dragged bleeding to the side where he was handcuffed to the post. Dmitri lost consciousness and did not return."[287] There is no official number for the size of the crowd in Tallinn on the evening of April 26, but most media reports estimated the number of rioters at 1,500.[288]

Due to the rapid escalation of the situation, the government's crisis committee decided to quickly remove the Bronze Soldier statue from its location in the early morning of April 27.[289] Nevertheless, the unrest continued in the following two to three days both in Tallinn and, to a lesser extent, in eastern Estonia, which is inhabited mainly by Russian-speakers in four smaller towns.[290]

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[284] ERR, "Chronology of the Bronze Soldier Conflict"; Mihkel Kärmas, "Ganinite Advokaadi Sõnul Kasutab Venemaa Juhtumit Poliitilistel Eesmärkidel" [According to Ganins' Lawyer, Russia Is Using the Case for Political Purposes], ERR, April 19, 2017, https://www.err.ee/590769/ganinite-advokaadi-sonul-kasutab-venemaa-juhtumit-poliitilistel-eesmarkidel.

[285] Kärmas, " According to Ganins' Lawyer, Russia Is Using the Case for Political Purposes."

[286] "В Эстонии дело об убийстве россиянина Дмитрия Ганина выделено в отдельное производство" [In Estonia, the case of the murder of the Russian Dmitry Ganin has been separated for separate proceedings], Newsru, November 20, 2008, https://www.newsru.com/world/20Nov2008/ganin.html.

[287] "В Таллине разрезан и вывезен по частям памятник Воину-освободителю. В беспорядках убит русскоязычный житель" [In Tallinn, a monument to the Liberator Soldier was cut and removed in parts. Russian-speaking resident was killed in riots], Newsru, April 27, 2007, https://www.newsru.com/world/27apr2007/tallin.html.

[288] Lepik, "The Leaders of the Bronze Night Disappeared to Russia"; "Fotod: Tõnismäel Meenutati Pronksiööd" [Photos: Bronze Nights were remembered on Tõnismäe], ERR, April 26, 2018, https://www.err.ee/826631/fotod-tonismael-meenutati-pronksiood; "Meenuta, Kus Olid Sina 5 Aastat Tagasi Pronksiöö Ajal?" [Remember where you were 5 years ago during Bronze Night?], *Delfi*, April 25, 2012, https://m.delfi.ee/rahvahaal/article.php?id=64307687.

[289] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 21.

[290] ERR, "Chronology of the Bronze Soldier Conflict."

In total, a thousand people who took part in the unrest in Tallinn and eastern Estonia from April 26 to 29 were detained.[291] Four people were charged with organizing the riots: three Night Watch activists—Dmitriy Linter, Maksim Reva, and Estonian journalist and politician Dimitriy Klenskiy—and the leader of the Russian youth organization Nashi in Estonia, Mark Siryk.[292]

3.   The Cyberattacks in the Bronze Soldier Incidents

On April 27, the day after the start of the street riots, Estonia was hit by two waves of cyber-attacks that lasted for about three weeks, until May 18. These cyber-attacks aimed to overload Estonia's computer and network servers with excessive volumes of message traffic, causing them to collapse.[293]

In the first wave, from April 27 to 29, Russian "autonomous" hackers incited fellow nationalistically or politically motivated individuals on social media, Russian-language Internet forums and websites to carry out attacks against Estonian websites.[294] These hackers granted online access to the necessary applications and specific directions that people could effortlessly download and use as "cyberweapons."[295] As a critical mass could not be mobilized, these attacks did not cause significant damage.[296]

The second stage of web activities from April 30 to May 18, in contrast, had characteristics of central command and control.[297] The second wave of cyber-attacks included "the denial of service (DoS) and distributed denial of service (DDoS) attacks,

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[291] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 22.

[292] Alo Raun, "Öise Vahtkonna Liidrid Jäid Kohtus Taas Õigeks" [The Night Watch Leaders Were Acquitted in Court Again], *Postimees*, May 12, 2009, https://www.postimees.ee/118044/oise-vahtkonna-liidrid-jaid-kohtus-taas-oigeks.

[293] Kertu Ruus, "Cyber War I: Estonia Attacked from Russia," *European Affairs* 9, no. 1–2 (2008), https://www.europeaninstitute.org/index.php/42-european-affairs/winterspring-2008/67-cyber-war-i-estonia-att.

[294] Fabian, "The Russian Hybrid Warfare Strategy," 320; Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, *International Cyber Incidents*, 33.

[295] Fabian, 320.

[296] Fabian, 320; Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 33.

[297] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 19, 33.

defacement of websites, and large amounts of comment and email spam."[298] Internet forums disseminated propaganda to incite cyber-attacks and instructions aimed at directing and supporting networked cyber-attacks.[299] The targets of the second wave of cyber-attacks were: 1. Servers of organizations accountable for the Estonian Internet framework; 2. Governmental and political institutions such as Parliament, the president, different ministries, state agencies, and political parties; 3. Services provided by the private sector, such as *e-banking*, news organizations; 4. Private and random targets.[300]

By 2007, 98 percent of Estonian territory was covered with Internet access, and cellular phone coverage was close to 100 percent.[301] Also, Estonia's information systems and databases had, by that time, been developed into a universal national information system with a corresponding functional foundation that allows customers to access services on a "one stop shopping" basis.[302] This means that many of the day-to-day services used by businesses and ordinary people were centralized in a single system or location.

The cyber-attacks affected and interrupted the Estonian internal economic sectors that mainly rely on information and communications technology and electronic communications in their everyday business, such as media, banking, and small and medium-sized businesses.[303] It also hindered access to communications with public administration information flow to the outside world, blocking parts of the benign web traffic as well as that for malicious uses.[304] These Russian-linked cyber-attacks on Estonia targeted the whole public and the economic base of the country, intending to paralyze a nation that significantly relies on digital networks.

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[298] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, *International Cyber Incidents*, 20.

[299] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 20.

[300] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 33.

[301] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 17.

[302] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 17.

[303] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 33.

[304] Tikk, Kaska, and Vihul, 33.

4. Blockade of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow

From April 27 to May 5, the Estonian embassy in the Russian capital, Moscow, was blockaded by members of Nashi and another Russian youth organization, Molodaya Rossiya.[305] About six hundred people besieged the embassy continuously.[306] They obstructed embassy staff and the movement of diplomats, both Estonian and other nationals; threw stones and paint at the building, causing material damage; and disrupted the embassy's work by constantly playing loud music from speakers.[307] Also, the protesters wrote offensive and provocative messages on the embassy walls, such as, "We arrived in Berlin; we also reach Tallinn."[308]

On May 1, four activists managed to get through the barriers protecting the embassy, who then tore down the Estonian flag from the embassy and shredded it to pieces.[309] During the Estonian flag's defilement, a delegation of the Russian duma visiting Estonia declared to the officials of the Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that Moscow's situation could be normalized in three minutes if the Russian side only wanted it.[310] On May 2, a Nashi activist attacked Estonian ambassador Marina Kaljurand with pepper spray at a press conference in the offices of the Moscow city government's weekly newspaper. Simultaneously, the protestors also attacked the ambassador's car as it stood in front of the

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[305] Rene Värk, *The Siege of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow: Protection of a Diplomatic Mission and Its Staff in the Receiving State*, University of Tartu, September 2008, 148–149, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312947524_The_Siege_of_the_Estonian_Embassy_in_Moscow_Protection_of_a_Diplomatic_Mission_and_Its_Staff_in_the_Receiving_State.

[306] "Noorteühendused On Moskva Eesti Saatkonna Blokeerinud" [Youth Associations Have Blocked the Estonian Embassy in Moscow], *Postimees*, April 30, 2007, https://www.postimees.ee/1655721/noorteuhendused-on-moskva-eesti-saatkonna-blokeerinud.

[307] *Postimees*, "Youth Associations Have Blocked the Estonian Embassy in Moscow"; "Foreign Minister Strongly Denounces the Continued Inactivity of the Russian Authorities," Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, April 29, 2007, https://vm.ee/en/news/foreign-minister-strongly-denounces-continued-inactivity-russian-authorities; Värk, *The Siege of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow*, 151–152.

[308] Postimees.

[309] Värk, 149; "Estonian Flag Torn off Estonian Embassy in Moscow," Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 1, 2007, https://vm.ee/en/news/estonian-flag-torn-estonian-embassy-moscow.

[310] Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Estonian Flag Torn off Estonian Embassy in Moscow."

building and tore off the Estonian flag.[311] After the press conference, the ambassador's car was caught in an ambush when two vehicles blocked the road and Nashi activists surrounded her car, demanding that she leave the country.[312] In a telephone conversation with his German counterpart Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov promised that the Russian government would ensure that police forces ended the embassy's blockade, provided that the Estonian ambassador left Moscow.[313] The Estonian ambassador left Moscow on April 3 or 4 and returned to Estonia on a so-called official holiday. After that, the protesters announced this as their victory in a newspaper interview entitled, "Marina Kaljurand, the ambassador of the fascist state, was given two options – apologize or leave the country. She chose the latter."[314]

E. RUSSIA'S AIMS, INFLUENCE CAMPAIGNS, AND USE OF NON-STATE ACTORS IN ESTONIA

How is Russia operating against Estonia?

1. Russia's Aims in Estonia

Russia does not have a great strategy other than to weaken the West, its alliances, and organizations and create a more favorable environment for spreading influence and pursuing its foreign policy goals.[315] Moscow implements so-called active measures— ways and means to influence the course of events in the target country or region to change the target area's policy toward Russia to a more favorable one—in Europe just to create

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[311] "Estonian Ambassador to Moscow Was Attacked," Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 2, 2007, https://vm.ee/en/news/estonian-ambassador-moscow-was-attacked; Värk, *The Siege of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow*, 150.

[312] Värk, 150–151.

[313] International Centre for Defence and Security, "Moskva Käsi Tallinna Rahutustes" [Moscow's Hand in Tallinn's Riots], *ICDS* (blog), May 11, 2007, https://icds.ee/et/moskva-kasi-tallinna-rahutustes/.

[314] Haldi Ellam, "Naši Lõpetas Moskva Saatkonna Juures Piketeerimise" [Nashi Stopped Picketing at the Moscow Embassy], *Eesti Päevaleht*, May 3, 2007, https://epl.delfi.ee/artikkel/51085692/nasi-lopetas-moskva-saatkonna-juures-piketeerimise?.

[315] Mark Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe,* ECFR/228 (London, UK: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), 1, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf.

instability and confusion.[316] Russia's actions are mainly opportunistic and shaped by local circumstances.[317] The Bronze Soldier incident presented Russia's opportunism in using favorable conditions to weaken its opponents, "if an opportunity arises to destabilize a country Russia considers an adversary, including NATO countries, there is a high probability that it will be exploited."[318]

Also, Russia lacks a central understanding and management or control structure to realize state interests outside Russia, and various interest groups in the state system are often acting independently based on separate interests, needs, and logic.[319] Kadri Liik, a senior expert of the European Council on Foreign Relations, cites the example of the constant deterioration in relations between Russia and Germany, one of the main reasons for which is the uncoordinated actions of various Russian system interest groups in Germany.[320] Such examples include the hacking of the German federal parliament in 2015; the "Lisa case," a disinformation campaign about a Russian-German girl allegedly raped by immigrants, in 2016; the murder of Georgian national Zelimkhan Khangoshvili in Tiergarten in 2019; and the poisoning of Alexey Navalny, hospitalized in Germany in 2021.[321]

Russia and its intelligence agencies took advantage of the tensions between Estonians and many Russian-speakers living in Estonia, such as the interpretation of history and citizenship issues that create a "one state-two societies" situation. For the Russians in Estonia, this monument and location symbolized mainly liberation. But for the Estonians,

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[316] Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos*, 1.

[317] Galeotti, 1.

[318] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 37.

[319] Kadri Liik, "Kadri Liik: Viis Asja, Mida Navalnõi Vahistamine Venemaa Kohta Ütleb" [Kadri Liik: Five Things that Navalny's Arrest Says about Russia], ERR, February 5, 2021, https://www.err.ee/1608099652/kadri-liik-viis-asja-mida-navalnoi-vahistamine-venemaa-kohta-utleb.

[320] Liik, "Kadri Liik: Five Things that Navalny's Arrest Says about Russia."

[321] Kate Connolly, "Russian Hacking Attack on Bundestag Damaged Trust, Says Merkel," *Guardian*, May 13, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/may/13/russian-hacking-attack-on-bundestag-damaged-trust-says-merkel; Stefan Meister, "The "Lisa Case": Germany as a Target of Russian Disinformation," *NATO Review*, July 25, 2016, https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2016/07/25/the-lisa-case-germany-as-a-target-of-russian-disinformation/index.html; "Germany Accuses Russia of Berlin Park Assassination," BBC, June 18, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-53091298; Liik.

it reminded them of almost half a century of occupation that brought with it mass deportations, poverty, and change in ethnic composition.[322] According to their own words, many stateless Russian-speaking Estonian residents feel like second-class members of society.[323] These differences were exploited until the crisis finally erupted, the aim of which was to paralyze the work of institutions ensuring security and state functions and to discredit the Estonian government.

Russian intelligence's failure to prepare a capable local command and organized groups of auxiliary forces in Estonia for the Bronze Soldier conflict shows Russia's opportunism in using the favorable occasion to weaken Estonia. Due to the rapid development of events before the crisis, the intelligence services did not have enough time to prepare. For starters, Lieutenant Colonel Andrey Lobanov of the FSB St. Petersburg Central Administrative Board failed to recruit suitable agents or collaborators at the beginning of 2007 in Estonia, in nearly the last moments before the unrest.[324] Probably as a result, ordinary Russian diplomats residing in Estonia were forced to guide and advise future organizers of turmoil at a time of rising tensions.[325] At the time of the unrest, Russian intelligence's role was to monitor developments and progress of the events[326] because responsibility had been given to previously instructed local collaborators— Dmitriy Linter, Maksim Reva, and Mark Siryk—who organized the uprising and tried to lead it directly.[327] This approach suggests that the evolving course of events was unfamiliar to Russian intelligence as well. Their later *modus operandi*, which was more successfully used in Georgia and Ukraine, was still in the developing stage in Estonia in 2007 and needed real-time testing.

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[322] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007,* IV.

[323] Vetik, "Citizenship, Statelessness and Belonging in Estonia," 7.

[324] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review2007*, 11.

[325] Rasmus Kagge, "Äärmuslaste Aktsioonide Tagant Paistab Vene Diplomaatide Vari" [The Shadow of Russian Diplomats Is behind the Actions of Extremists], *Postimees*, April 25, 2007, https://www.postimees.ee/1653973/aarmuslaste-aktsioonide-tagant-paistab-vene-diplomaatide-vari; Estonian Internal Security Service, 9.

[326] Estonian Internal Security Service, 9.

[327] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 19–24.

2. Media Influence before, during and after the Bronze Soldier Events

One of the main channels for implementing Russia's active measures towards Estonia is the media. A greater and more influential part of the Russian media is under the Russian central government's direct control.[328] Before and during the Bronze Soldier events, Russian-speakers in Estonia mainly consumed Russian media content or Russian-language programs created especially for Estonian and the Baltics' Russian audiences.[329] In their report *Russia's Hostile Measures: Combating Russian Gray Zone Aggression Against NATO in the Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of Competition*, Stephanie Pezard, Katya Migacheva, and Brenna Allen list popular television channels, which Estonia's Russian audience mainly follow. These include "PBK, a subsidiary of the Russian-owned BMA media conglomerate, which rebroadcasts Russian media in the Baltics; the state-owned RTR-Planeta, which broadcasts globally; NTV, which is owned by Gazprom; and the Russian government–controlled RT, formerly Russia Today, whose multilingual broadcasting has been the target of propaganda accusations in several countries, including the United States."[330] According to the authors, "The majority of Russian media in both Russia and Estonia has toed the Russian government's official line arguing that Estonia misrepresented history in service of its goals, was experiencing a fascist revival, and put Russian speakers in Estonia at risk of persecution, repression, and discrimination."[331]

Russia's attempts to divide and influence Estonian society through information operations and propaganda did not end in 2007. Russia's influence activities continue according to a similar pattern that led to the Bronze Soldier conflict.

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[328] Kaitsepolitseiamet [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2010* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2010] (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2011), 10, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[329] Stephanie Pezard, Katya Migacheva, and Brenna Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures: Combating Russian Gray Zone Aggression Against NATO in the Contact, Blunt, and Surge Layers of Competition. Appendix B: Detailed Case Studies of Russia's Use of Hostile Measures*, Report No. RR2539 (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2020), 54, https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR2500/RR2539/RAND_RR2539z2.appendixB.pdf.

[330] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 54.

[331] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, 54.

The purpose of the media controlled by the Russian central government is not to truly reflect the world events but to deal with Russia's image building and fulfill the country's domestic and foreign policy goals.[332] Russian media channels regularly send both print journalists and television crews to Estonia, who do not engage in journalistic work but organize productions according to a given scenario.[333]

There appear to be three primary aims of Russian propaganda and information operations in Estonia. First, to show that after the secession from the Soviet Union, Estonia has become an economically, socially, and culturally degenerate society on the European periphery, in which the anti-Russian Estonian government is accused.[334] Second, to create tense relations between the natives and the Russian-speaking community, Russia's disinformation operations aim to sow distrust of the Estonian state and show Russia as a defender of Russian-speakers' interests.[335] Third, Russia wants to create the image of Estonia as an undemocratic and problematic partner for NATO and the EU to weaken relations with Estonia's allies and reduce its international clout in influencing Russia's policy.[336]

Several informational narratives and negative themes have been deployed by Russia, which are repeated continuously and are deliberately exploited.[337] The main themes developed against Estonia are the following:

- "Estonia is an undemocratic and pro-fascist state." – For as long as Estonia has been independent, Russia has developed a narrative about

[332] Kaitsepolitseiamet, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2010*, 10.

[333] Kaitsepolitseiamet.

[334] Kaitsepolitseiamet.

[335] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *Eesti Rahvusvahelises Julgeolekukeskkonnas 2017* [International Security and Estonia 2017] (Tallinn, Estonia: EFIS, 2017), 19–21, https://www.valisluureamet.ee/pdf/TA_raport_2017_EST.pdf; Kaitsepolitseiamet, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review2010*, 10.

[336] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2017*, 19–21.

[337] Ilmar Raag and Aleksei Günter, *Eesti Strateegilise Kommunikatsiooni Kilde 2015–2016* [Fragments of Estonian Strategic Communication 2015–2016] (Tallinn, Estonia: Propastop, 2016), 6, https://www.propastop.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Eesti-strateegilise-kommunikatsiooni-kilde-2015-2016-2.-osa.pdf.

Estonia as an undemocratic country where national minorities are discriminated against, and fascism is rehabilitated. This topic is aimed at both the Western public and the Russian audience in both Russia and Estonia.[338]

- "ETV+[339] is a propaganda channel, and the Estonian government is waging an information war against Russia." – An example of this narrative is the story ETV+ published in July 2016 on the Russian TV channel Rossiya1's news program "Vesti." The story emphasized how Estonia tries to exterminate everything that is Russian-like in the country. It was claimed that members of the Riigikogu (Estonian Parliament) are forbidden to communicate with Russian journalists in Estonia. Additionally, the news claimed that a Russian-language TV channel, ETV+, was created in Estonia to fight the incomprehensible so-called Russian propaganda.[340]

- "The refugee crisis in Estonia." – The exploitation of the European-wide refugee crisis in the Russian media has been active since September 2016. In this case, it is possible to observe the coexistence of two different narratives. First, "European governments cannot manage their refugee crisis and do not listen to their people"; therefore, "Europe has bad governments and good people."[341] An example concerning Estonia is the TV channel Rossiya's news story about the anti-refugee demonstration in Tallinn.[342] The background message of the story is that, "even Estonia's

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[338] Raag and Günter, *Fragments of Estonian Strategic Communication 2015–2016*, 6.

[339] ETV+ is a television channel of Estonian Public Broadcasting that broadcasts Russian-language television programs.

[340] Raag and Günter, 8–9.

[341] Raag and Günter, 10.

[342] "Эстония митингует против приема мигрантов" [Estonia Protests against Admitting Migrants], October 14, 2015, Россия 24 [Russia 24], video, 3:21, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk4-_Ucqirk.

own people do not support their government."[343] Second, the parallel narrative is "Estonians are racists." This is an old theme, "Estonians are fascists," but in the refugee-crisis framework, it has been modified to the theme "Estonians are racists."[344]

- "Discrimination against the Russian population is amplified in the refugee crisis." – The so-called discrimination against the Russian population in Estonia became a sub-topic of the refugee crisis. This narrative took a new turn in several similar stories when rumors spread that Estonia would treat new migrants better than its Russian-speakers. The main message is that if "the Russians were previously second-class citizens, then when refugees arrive, they become third-class citizens."[345]

- In the field of politics, the topics of the "alleged mythical Russian threat" and "Russia's so-called aggressive behavior" stand out more than others. These topics are mainly circulated in the leading Russian online portals.[346] Estonia has been portrayed as a russophobic and about-to-be-extinct small country that is heavily militarized.[347]

Media outlets and information channels that disseminate the propaganda narratives in Estonia are not operating independently. These are guided and commanded through high-level Russian authorities that often have links to the state's intelligence and security agencies.

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[343] Raag and Günter, *Fragments of Estonian Strategic Communication 2015–2016*, 11.

[344] Raag and Günter, 11.

[345] Raag and Günter, 13.

[346] Raag and Günter, 14.

[347] Andrus Tamberg, „Eesti Kuvand Venemaa *Online*-Meedias 2015. Aastal Julgeoleku Seisukohalt" [Estonia's Image in the Russian Online Media in 2015 from the Security Point of View] (master's thesis, Estonian Academy of Security Sciences, 2016), 44–45, https://digiriiul.sisekaitse.ee/bitstream/handle/ 123456789/39/2016_Tamberg%20.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

3. Russian Non-State Actors and State Actors that Lead and Direct Them

Before and during the Bronze Soldier incidents, Yekaterina Zorina, a journalist from the Russian TV channel RTR, and Galina Sapozhnikova, a journalist from the Moscow newspaper *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, were used as direct malign influence tools against Estonia.[348] These journalists coordinated their activities in Estonia, framed events, manipulated facts, and spread outright lies to discredit the Estonian state, government, authorities, and media.[349] At the beginning of 2007, Zorina coordinated a plan with the leaders of the pro-Kremlin extremist youth movement Nashi to organize provocations at the location of the Bronze Soldier in Estonia.[350] Also, Sapozhnikova called herself a disguised member of the Russian auxiliary group in Estonia Night Watch, established in 2006, and attended that organization's meetings before the riots.[351] Moreover, Sapozhnikova actively continued anti-Estonian activities after 2007.

Since 2007, Sapozhnikova has continued to write propaganda texts and opinion stories hostile to the Baltic states.[352] She worked as a correspondent for *Komsomolskaya Pravda* in Estonia and led the Impressum chat club, which brought journalists, historians, and politicians critical of the West to Estonia.[353] In 2013, Sapozhnikova compiled a list of "promising Estonian people" for the President of the Russian Federation Administration's Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries (DIRCCFC).[354] There were nineteen names in this list, mainly Russian-speaking Estonian politicians and journalists.[355] It is possible that these people were seen

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[348] Kaitsepolitseiamet, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review2007*, 15.

[349] Kaitsepolitseiamet.

[350] Kaitsepolitseiamet.

[351] Kaitsepolitseiamet.

[352] Holger Roonemaa, "'Perspektiivsed Eesti Inimesed': Nimekiri Vene Välisluure Kindrali Laual" ["Promising Estonians": A List on the Table of the Russian Foreign Intelligence General], *Eesti Ekspress*, November 24, 2020, https://ekspress.delfi.ee/kuum/perspektiivsed-eesti-inimesed-nimekiri-vene-valisluure-kindrali-laual?id=91760357.

[353] Roonemaa, "'Promising Estonians.'"

[354] Roonemaa.

[355] Roonemaa.

as potential agents of influence through whom to gather information, to influence policy, and to communicate.[356] At the top of the list was the then deputy mayor of Tallinn and the current mayor, a member of the Estonian Center Party.[357] The next three names also come from the Center Party.[358] It is known that Russia actively uses its network of influencing agents to disrupt and influence European decision-making processes and is handled by the European-based coordinators.[359] In August 2020, President Putin awarded her the title of meritorious journalist of the Russian Federation.[360]

The DIRCCFC is a structural unit in the Administration of the President of the Russian Federation and was formed in February 2005.[361] It is headed by the SVR General Vladimir Chernov, and the DIRCCFC reports directly to Anton Vaino, head of the Presidential Administration.[362] In 2005, the EISS assessed that the directorate's real goal is to consolidate the Russian diaspora in the neighboring states and influence Russian communities and other "near-abroad" residents in Moscow's interests.[363] The main task and goals of the DIRCCFC are to influence and control neighboring countries and achieve Russia's foreign policy goals by non-military means.[364] To achieve their goals, they can

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[356] Roonemaa, "'Promising Estonians.'"

[357] Roonemaa.

[358] Roonemaa.

[359] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2018*, 46.

[360] Holger Roonemaa, "Venemaa Ajaloofondi Põhieesmärk: Õõnestada Baltimaade Ajalookäsitlust Mitmel Erineval Moel" [The Main Goal of the Russian History Foundation: To Undermine the Baltic Approach to History in Many Different Ways], *Eesti Ekspress*, November 24, 2020, https://ekspress.delfi.ee/kuum/venemaa-ajaloofondi-pohieesmark-oonestada-baltimaade-ajalookasitlust-mitmel-erineval-moel?id=91767565.

[361] Kaitsepolitseiamet [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2005* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2005] (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2006), 12, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[362] Roonemaa, "'Promising Estonians.'"

[363] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review 2005*, 11.

[364] Roonemaa.

involve Russian special services and intelligence agencies to procure and manage influence agents in post-Soviet countries.[365]

One of the Russian propaganda methods is to keep suitable narratives in the spotlight through Kremlin-funded non-governmental organizations (NGO).[366] The rhetoric that begins this way is promptly amplified by the Russian propaganda media and thus reaches the free media.[367] There are many formerly independent organizations under the control of DIRCCFC management.[368] One example is the Historical Memory Foundation (HMF), which appears to be operating independently, but documents and the correspondence leaked to the press indicate that the DIRCCFC coordinates HMF's activities.[369]

In 2018, HMF manager Aleksandr Dyukov delivered a report about the first ten years of the foundation's activities to DIRCCFC.[370] Dyukov portrays himself as a historian who is also related to the FSB—in reality, he lacks both a scientific degree and considerable professional achievements.[371] The report highlights HMF's five main lines of action: counteracting attempts to classify Soviet repression as genocide; discrediting the concept of the Holodomor famine in Soviet Ukraine in the 1930s; exposing and disseminating information on Baltic collaborators involved in Nazi crimes and the Holocaust; countering

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365 Roonemaa; Oleg Samorodni, "Head Küüditajad Vastiku Natsiriigi Vastu" [Good Deporters against the Disgusting Nazi State], *Eesti Päevaleht*, November 30, 2020, https://epl.delfi.ee/arvamus/vene-meedia-paevik-head-kuuditajad-vastiku-natsiriigi-vastu-kremli-sonum-leiab-eestiski-levitajaid?id=91821601.

366 Propastop team, "Ajalugu Propaganda Tööriistana" [History as a Tool of Propaganda], *Propastop* (blog), June 6, 2016, https://www.propastop.org/2016/06/13/ajalugu-propaganda-tooriistana/.

367 Propastop team, "History as a Tool of Propaganda."

368 Samorodni, "Good Deporters against the Disgusting Nazi State."

369 Roonemaa, "The Main Goal of the Russian History Foundation."

370 Roonemaa.

371 Pekka Erelt, "Vene Propaganda Kasutab Eesti Ajaloolasi Eesti Vastu" [Russian Propaganda Uses Estonian Historians against Estonia], *Eesti Ekspress*, June 1, 2016, https://ekspress.delfi.ee/ajalugu/vene-propaganda-kasutab-eesti-ajaloolasi-eesti-vastu?id=74669489; Kaitsepolitseiamet [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2008* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2008] (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2009), 29, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

the glorification of the Second World War Baltic freedom fighters, the Forest Brothers; and discrediting the interwar political regimes in the Baltic states.[372]

Each line of action includes searching for documents in archives; preparing scientific publications, documentaries, and exhibitions; presenting the results in Russia and abroad; and organizing media campaigns.[373] In line with these efforts, Dyukov was given unusual access to the FSB archives, which are normally closed to genuine historians and scholars.[374] According to the report, the HMS has established a network of 124 foreign historians, politicians, and journalists.[375] Five people from Estonia belong to the network, including one journalist, but their names have not been published.[376] The HMF coordinates at least eleven non-profit organizations, which also help convey the necessary messages.[377]

HMF has aimed at the comprehensive discrediting and denigration of the resistance to the Soviet occupation.[378] The Estonian resistance movement participants, the Forest Brotherhood, are portrayed as bloodthirsty bandits whose only motives were self-interest and revenge on the local population.[379] In 2010, the HMF launched an online database, "Victims of Nationalist Terror in the Western Regions of the USSR" to discredit the Forest Brothers.[380]

4. Cyber Operations

While other malign and aggressive activities and events during the "Bronze Nights" were relatively predictable, at least in later analysis, the cyber-attacks made this combined

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[372] Roonemaa.

[373] Roonemaa, " The Main Goal of the Russian History Foundation."

[374] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review 2008*, 29.

[375] Roonemaa.

[376] Roonemaa.

[377] Roonemaa.

[378] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review 2010*, 14.

[379] Estonian Internal Security Service.

[380] Estonian Internal Security Service.

hybrid campaign different from previous conflicts. Estonian Ministry of Defense official Meelis Oidsalu has said, "The only thing that was not foreseen was the cyber-attacks."[381]

The exact purpose of the cyber-attacks in the Bronze Soldier case is not entirely clear.[382] Rain Ottis, head of the Cyber Forensics and Cyber Security Center of Tallinn University of Technology, suggests that the cyber-attacks in the Bronze Soldier events were information operations where information and information technology were used to influence the opponent's decisions and actions.[383] In other words, their purpose was to create confusion among Estonian authorities and society and disrupt freedom of action and decision-making capacity.

Ottis outlines three possible aims for cyber-attacks, which are likely to be interrelated. These are: 1. An attempt to unite the Russian diaspora against a so-called common enemy; 2. An attempt to destabilize the Estonian society and undermine the state's economy to weaken its ties to the EU and NATO; 3. A proof of [Ottis's developed] concept on the idea of a digital people's war while supporting the overall political campaign surrounding the statue.[384] According to Ottis, the concept of a people's war in the context of cyber-attacks refers to the situation in which "ordinary citizens of a state can be motivated to use the resources under their control to independently attack enemy systems in order to confuse the defenders."[385]

As with the precise aims of the attacks, despite the investigations, it has not been possible to establish that Russia, as a country, was behind the cyber-attacks.[386] No entity has taken responsibility for organizing the attacks, and Russia has denied its involvement

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[381] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 19.

[382] Rain Ottis, *Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective* (Tallinn, Estonia: Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence, 2018), https://ccdcoe.org/uploads/2018/10/Ottis2008_AnalysisOf2007FromTheInformationWarfarePerspective.pdf; Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 55–56.

[383] Ottis, *Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective*.

[384] Ottis.

[385] Ottis.

[386] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 56, 57; Ottis.

in cyber-attacks against Estonia.[387] Nevertheless, it is clear that the cyber-attacks were linked with Estonia and Russia's overall political conflict.[388] "The lack of cooperation in the Estonian investigation indicates that the Russian government is not interested in identifying the attackers and is therefore, in essence, protecting them. In other words, hostile rhetoric from the political elite motivated people to attack Estonia while nothing was done to stop the attacks. This silent consent, however, can be interpreted as implicit state support because without fear of retribution the attackers were free to target Estonian systems."[389]

Despite their massive size, the attacks were not complex; it is likely that the cyber-attacks were not carried out by Russian professional cyber units but mainly by so-called Russian patriotic hackers.[390] These hackers organized and launched attacks and, as in street riots, involved like-minded and spontaneous participants. As described in the second chapter of this thesis, Russian patriotic hackers cooperate with Russian security agencies, such as the FSB. As cyber-attacks against an entire country were the first in history in 2007 and therefore new to everyone, the FSB probably did not lead or task hackers but was aware of and conducive to their actions. It is also possible that the FSB took this first-time "cyber campaign" as a test in which hackers were given freedom of action and monitored for what kind of damage they could do to the target country.[391]

In the final analysis, however, the damage was surprisingly modest and temporary.[392] Despite the attacks, in Estonia—where 97 percent of bank transactions are carried out online and 60 percent of the population uses the Internet every day—daily life

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[387] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, 56, 57; Ottis.

[388] Ottis.

[389] Ottis, *Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective*.

[390] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 56, 57; Ottis, *Analysis of the 2007 Cyber Attacks Against Estonia from the Information Warfare Perspective*; Andrzej Kozlowski, "Comparative Analysis of Cyberattacks on Estonia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan," *European Scientific Journal* 3, (February 2014): 238, https://core.ac.uk/reader/236412320.

[391] Kozlowski, "Comparative Analysis of Cyberattacks on Estonia, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan," 239.

[392] Ruus, "Cyber War I."

changes or interruptions were actually minor.[393] Estonian journalist Kertu Ruus refers to Jim Lewis, a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC, who states that cyber-attacks on Estonia amounted to "blocking the highways and pounding on doors to make a political point."[394] It is likely that the attackers also tried to test Estonia's electronic defense capabilities for possible hostile activities in the future.

5. Auxiliary Actors

In 2006–2007, simultaneously with the information operations and the waves of propaganda, the so-called compatriot's policy, used as a foreign policy tool of Russia, became more active.[395] The idea of exploiting Russian-speakers abroad, called "compatriots" (*sootechestvenniki*), to pursue national interests had been familiar to the KGB since Soviet times.[396] The Constitutional Party was a subversive project led by Russia, and an auxiliary organization of Russian special services in Estonia. This so-called party was, in fact, existed mainly on paper because because often it was not able to gather enough of its members to organize demonstrations, which is why the party claimed other social movements' protests under its name.[397] The Constitutional Party claimed publicly that it represented the Russian-speaking population in Estonia, but its central financial and ideological supporters were diplomats from the Russian embassy in Tallinn, various Moscow city government agencies, the Russian media, and different contact persons in the Russian special services.[398] Andrei Zarenkov, the Constitutional Party leader in Estonia, became one of the main agitators of pro-Russian propaganda dissemination and compatriot

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[393] Ruus.

[394] Ruus, "Cyber War I."

[395] Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2006* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2006] (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2007), 9,11 https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[396] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 3.

[397] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2006*, 11.

[398] Estonian Internal Security Service.

policy.[399] In early 2007, before the Bronze Soldier riots, Zarenkov met several times with Vadim Vassilyev, the Russian embassy's first secretary, who coordinated Zarenkov's subversive messages to the public.[400]

Dimitriy Linter, one of the main organizers of the Bronze Soldier street riots, was an auxiliary activist in Estonia, whose task was most likely to create a pro-Kremlin ideological auxiliary force consisting of local Russians. Nonetheless, this required the creation of appropriate preconditions. He was a former member of the Russian Party in Estonia, and became more engaged in 2005 when planning several propaganda and protest activities against Estonia and Latvia with his Latvian counterparts.[401] Like Zarenkov, Linter repeatedly met with the Russian embassy senior advisor, Sergey Overtenko, in Estonia.[402]

The population-splitting strategy supported by Russia and amplified by Estonian auxiliary activists created a suitable situation in 2006, when people attacked the Estonian flag at the Bonze Soldier site, and Linter was able to start an auxiliary movement, Night Watch. In reality, however, Night Watch was not very effective because despite the efforts of Linter and other activists, Maksim Reva, Dmitry Klenskiy, and Mark Siryk, to expand the organization, it had no more than twenty to thirty active members.[403]

Many Night Watch members and people associated with this group did not always take Linter seriously or at least did not follow him as an authoritative leader. Many members of the Russian community in Estonia shared this auxiliary group's ideology, but the Night Watch did not become a representative figure of the community. This auxiliary group was not able to increase its membership much in a year. Still, they were able to increase tensions in Estonian society through their provocative activities, such as guarding

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[399] Estonian Internal Security Service, 9, 11.

[400] Kagge, "The Shadow of Russian Diplomats Is Behind the Actions of Extremists."

[401] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service Review 2005*, 16.

[402] Kagge, "The Shadow of Russian Diplomats Is Behind the Actions of Extremists."

[403] Kriminaalasi Dmitri Linteri, Dimitri Klenski, Maksim Reva ja Mark Sirõki süüdistuses KarS § 238 järgi [Criminal proceedings against Dmitriy Linter, Dimitriy Klenskiy, Maksim Reva and Mark Siryk pursuant to § 238 of the Penal Code], 1–07-13025, 11 (2009), https://juura.files.wordpress.com/2013/01/klenski-ja-pronksic3b6c3b6-kaasus.pdf.

the figure of the Bronze Soldier in Soviet uniform and distributing leaflets with hostile and manipulative messages.[404]

The Night Watch and its leaders were involved in provoking the street riots. However, at the time of the unrest, their role was more marginal, as the majority of protesters joined the riots spontaneously and in improvised ways. This pro-Kremlin auxiliary group played a part in starting the unrest, but while it lasted, it was chaos that no one was able to control or direct. Besides the simple destruction of the city center's infrastructure, there was no central follow-up idea, and the police suppressed the riot. When destroying the city center was the goal, the Night Watch met its purpose, but if the plan was a long-term and more profound crisis that could have led to the government's resignation, the auxiliary group and its leaders failed.

6.   Proxy Actors

During the Bronze Soldier street riots, Nashi leaders in Russia tried to send organization members to Estonia to support Night Watch auxiliaries. Nashi members who wanted to travel to Estonia did so mainly for financial remuneration and excitement, thus for personal gain and self-interest.[405] Therefore, in the Bronze Soldier events context, Nashi was primarily a proxy organization whose members were ideologically pro-Kremlin, but operated for their own interests and benefits. This Nashi support effort to Russian speakers in Estonia failed because most of the members were turned back from the Estonian border. A few who were able to enter the country arrived in Estonia on April 29, when the riots in the streets were already suppressed.[406]

The blocking of the Estonian embassy in Moscow shows how the Russian authorities used proxy organizations, Nashi and Molodaya Rossiya, to pressure and harass Estonian diplomatic representatives. The Kremlin directs, supports, and finances the activities of both groups.[407] According to Professor Rene Värk of the Estonian University

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[404] Kriminaalasi, 1–07-13025, 2–9.

[405] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2007*, 14.

[406] Estonian Internal Security Service.

[407] Värk, *The Siege of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow*, 153.

of Tartu, "Russia used the youth organizations for activities it did not want to carry out through agents of governmental authorities."[408] Most likely, members of these organizations, such as Nashi and Molodaya Rossiya, are ideologically driven. Yet, while they were blocking the Estonian embassy in Moscow, they were acting out of self-interest. In that case, protesters were paid 550–1000 rubles (7.45–13.50 U.S. dollars) a day for their activities.[409]

At the same time, Russian law-enforcement authorities directly supported the activities of members of Nashi and Molodaya Rossiya in the blockade of the Estonian embassy. Moscow police forces usually react very strongly and decisively to protests in the Russian capital, but at the Estonian embassy, the police responded passively and apathetically.[410] It is not known whether the members of Nashi who attacked the Estonian ambassador with pepper spray and later organized an ambush on the street, which is an outrageous violation of diplomatic rules, have been prosecuted and punished. After the Estonian ambassador left Moscow, the protesters removed their camp and the police their barriers practically synchronously, like a united team.[411]

The protesters also had an apparent and well-prepared base camp that did not support the seemingly spontaneous gathering of "young rebels," but instead signaled well-organized and planned preparations and support from higher authorities. The protesters were set up with outdoor toilets, an outdoor kitchen, more than thirty identical tents, power supply, modern water appliances, cleaning from Moscow's municipal services, proper sound equipment, and good quality posters that changed every day.[412] This support system allowed them to operate in shifts without interruption. Also, protesters were brought by buses from other Russian regions, and according to the Estonian *Eesti Päevaleht*

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[408] Värk, 152.

[409] Quoted in Värk, *The Siege of the Estonian Embassy in Moscow*, 152.

[410] *Postimees*, "Youth Associations Have Blocked the Estonian Embassy in Moscow."

[411] International Centre for Defence and Security, "Moscow's Hand in Tallinn's Riots."

[412] *Postimees*, "Moscow's Hand in Tallinn's Riots"; International Centre for Defence and Security.

newspaper, the farthest arrivals were from Mordovia, 445 kilometers (276 miles) from Moscow.[413]

a.   Creation of Possible Russian Auxiliary and Proxy Forces in Estonia After 2007

A pertinent example of Russian auxiliary and proxy forces involves knife fighting clubs and the figure of one Russian named Kirill Lyubin who appeared to Estonia in 2009, two years after the Bronze Soldier events.

According to the U.S Army's John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School's 2019 regional threat overview, "It has been thoroughly reported in the media that Russia sponsors numerous tactical training organizations in the Baltic States and Balkans including paintball, airsoft and knife fighting clubs to recruit and exert influence."[414] Anne Applebaum from *The Washington Post* specifies that "Russian trainers with military connections—even special forces connections—have joined some clubs in those countries as trainers, teaching what one observer described as "small unit tactics"."[415]

In Estonia, knife fighting is practiced among enthusiasts of certain martial arts clubs, but it is not known that knife fighting is widespread among large groups. Still, public sources found by the author show that, at least from 2009 until 2011, knife fighting workshops and seminars in Estonia held by an instructor from Russia have been advertised in Estonian Russian-language martial arts Internet forums.[416] The instructor, Lyubin, has been a Russian citizen and senior instructor of the Russian knife fighting school Tolpar.[417]

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[413] International Centre for Defence and Security.

[414] John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School, "Russia - Regional Threat Overview."

[415] Anne Applebaum, "Airsoft Guns and Hard Power."

[416] Vladimir, "Pärnu Aikido Klubi "Takemusu Aiki" esitleb: NOAKOOL "Tolpar" /Venemaa/ Meister-klass, 14 Märts 2009" [Pärnu Aikido Club "Takemusu Aiki" presents: KNIFE-FIGHTING SCHOOL "Tolpar" / Russia / Master class, March 14, 2009], Noakool "Tolpar" meister-klass Pärnus, 14 märts 2009 [Knife-fighting school "Tolpar" master class in Pärnu, March 14, 2009], *Aikido Aikikai Forum*, February 16, 2009, http://aikido.ee/forum/topic.php?forum=11&topic=27; Sõdalaste Koda, "Meister-Klass Noavõitluses Toimub Tallinnas" [The master class in knife fighting takes place in Tallinn], *Google Groups Conversations*, November 18, 2010, https://groups.google.com/g/sodalaste-koda/c/LEjNbGod9Yc?pli=1; Sõdalaste Koda, "Noavõitluse Meister-Klass" [The knife fighting master class], *Google Groups Conversations*, June 16, 2011, https://groups.google.com/g/sodalased/c/eZcUVXoSmac.

[417] Vladimir, "Pärnu Aikido Club "Takemusu Aiki" Presents."

Lyubin advertises himself as "a reserve officer of the special forces unit of the FSB of Russia, President of the Russian Knife Fighting Federation."[418] Also, it appears that he is an alumnus of both the FSB Academy and the Russian Academy of State Service under the President of the Russian Federation.[419] Lyubin has been working as a knife fighting instructor since 2004 and has conducted seminars and courses in Estonia, Lithuania, Ukraine, France, Italy, and India.[420] The Estonian branch of the Russian knife fighting school Tolpar was opened in the Estonian city of Pärnu, where it recruits new members and enthusiasts.[421]

Lyubin has trained Russian special forces in Russia as well. Lyubin's public Facebook account includes a photo (uploaded December 4, 2014) in which he participates in a tactical training near Khimki, a Moscow suburb, as part of a small unit or a special-purpose unit-like group, and several others (uploaded 2016–2019) in which he participates at a tactical training of a similar group in the Moscow suburb of Balashikha, at the Vityaz training center. The Vityaz training center is also known as the 604th Special Purpose Center of Russian Internal troops.[422] Lyubin's previous connection to the Internal Troops can be seen in a 2014 photo on his Facebook account, under which he comments that he conducted knife fighting training for Russian Internal Troops special-purpose units.

The Internal Troops of Ministry for the Internal Affairs of Russia (Внутренние войска Министерства внутренних дел, Vnutrenniye Voiska Ministerstva Vnutrennikh Del – VV MVD) were transferred to Rosgvardia (the Russian version of the U.S. National

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[418] Kirill Lyubin, "Обо Мне" [About me], 2015, https://lyubinkirill.com/about-me.

[419] Любин, "Обо Мне."

[420] Любин.

[421] Asso Puidet, "Nuga Sisse – See Käib Lihtsalt" [Knife in - It's Easy], *Pärnu Postimees*, March 7, 2010, https://parnu.postimees.ee/233675/nuga-sisse-see-kaib-lihtsalt.

[422] "Береты цвета крови: почему спецназу "Витязь" доверяют самые сложные задачи" [Berets of the Color of Blood: Why the "Vityaz" Spetsnaz Are Entrusted with the Most Difficult Tasks], *RIA Novosti*, December 29, 2017, https://ria.ru/20171229/1511919235.html; Mark Galeotti, *Russian Security and Paramilitary Forces since 1991* (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2013), 30; George1, February 13, 2012, Post no. 6 - comment on "Internal Troops – MVD Spetsnaz (ODON) Thread," *Russia Defence Forum*, https://www.russiadefence.net/t840-rosgvardia-national-guard-of-russia-thread.

Guard) in 2016 and are routinely involved in annual strategic exercises with the FSB.[423] These forces have a wide range of responsibilities, from covert operations to military action; they played a central role in both Chechen wars (1994–1996, 1999–2009) and have actively participated in most of Russia's contemporary armed conflicts.[424] Combined, their abilities cover "intelligence collection, propaganda and information campaigns, coordination of criminal and paramilitary groups, covert operations, cyber operations, and support operations during the active phase of military operations and insurgency."[425] The 604th Special Purpose Center units are also used to support the FSB elite special units from FSB Special Operations Center (FSB SOC).[426]

In addition to the Vityaz training center, the Balashikha district also houses the FSB's highly secure FSB SOC, the base for the elite and secretive special units Alpha and Vympel, and the Vympel Association of Former FSB Spetsnaz Officers.[427] The Vympel special unit, now in FSB SOC, was established in the KGB in 1981 to carry out subversive operations in foreign states, and its capacities included "illegal reconnaissance, subversion, kidnappings, freeing hostages, *coups d'etat* and assassinations of enemies to the state."[428] According to Bellingcat's analysis, the FSB SOC and the Vympel Association prepared and supported a Russian citizen with a criminal background who is suspected of the assassination of Georgian Zelimkhan Khangoshvili on August 23, 2019, in Berlin, Germany.[429] This is just one example from public sources, but it shows that the units in Balashikha are planning and preparing complex and covert operations abroad.

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[423] Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military*, 210, 211–212.

[424] Radin et al., 205.

[425] Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military*, 222.

[426] George1, comment on "Internal Troops – MVD Spetsnaz (ODON) Thread."

[427] Bellingcat Investigation Team, "'V' For 'Vympel': FSB's Secretive Department 'V' Behind Assassination of Georgian Asylum Seeker in Germany," Bellingcat, last modified February 17, 2020, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/02/17/v-like-vympel-fsbs-secretive-department-v-behind-assassination-of-zelimkhan-khangoshvili/.

[428] Bellingcat Investigation Team, "'V' For 'Vympel': FSB's Secretive Department 'V' Behind Assassination of Georgian Asylum Seeker in Germany."

[429] Bellingcat Investigation Team.

Based on available public sources found by the author, Lyubin cannot be directly linked to the FSB SOC and the Vympel Association, but these sources show that he is a former FSB special unit member and currently the FSB captain in reserve. Sources also show his connections with the VV MVD special-purpose units and his participation in tactical exercises at the Balashikha base, whose units cooperate with and support nearby FSB special units. FSB special units, especially Vympel, specialize in subversive operations abroad and have on-the-ground experience in recent conflicts, such as in Ukraine and Syria. Lyubin's FSB background, his presence and tactical training in Balashikha, as well as the specifics of the units there, which would be suitable for preparing and conducting operations in Russia's hybrid campaigns, suggest the sorts of non-state agents that Russia could use to gain adherents in foreign lands. Against this background, Lyubin's connection with Estonia—the courses and training he has conducted and the knife fighting club Tolpar in Pärnu-—is significant.

7. Organized Crime

In Estonia's case, there is no proof that the Russian special services recruited people directly from the criminal world or that local auxiliary leaders knowingly cooperated with organized crime in the framework of the Bronze Soldier events to accomplish their objectives. The majority of destructive and looting protesters detained and arrested by the police were seventeen- to twenty-four-year-old Russian-speaking Estonian residents.[430] It is noteworthy that "people suspected of crimes or other offenses during the riots had probably (74% of cases) committed some before."[431] But most of the rioters joined spontaneously. The high percentage of criminality among detainees most likely shows that people who have already broken the law possess the mindset or tend to do so again more easily once the opportunity arises.

Although the involvement of organized crime did not emerge in the Bronze Soldier case, it is relevant in the framework of this thesis to provide examples of the previous links of Estonian crime to Russia and how Russia uses criminal groups against Estonia.

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[430] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007*, 22.

[431] Juurvee and Mattiisen, 23.

By the beginning of the 1990s, when Estonia became independent, there was, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union territories, organized crime, which global commentators often refer to as the "Russian mafia".[432] Organized crime, which developed in the conditions of independent Estonia, did not differ from its traditions with the criminal traditions valid elsewhere in the former Soviet Union.[433] In 1997, the director-general of the EISS warned that Estonia, at the crossroads of international crime, was in danger of becoming a transit country for the smuggling of drugs, weapons, and nuclear materials by Russian organized crime.[434] At the time, Russia had enough internal problems, leaving organized crime to act mainly in its own interests in Estonia, and it was not yet used as a tool against Estonia.[435] In the first half of the 2000s, Estonia began to change from a country of origin for Russian organized crime to the country of destination.[436]

Today, the close link between organized crime with a Russian background and Russia's special services and other branches of power has been repeatedly confirmed; in essence, Russian organized crime and Russian security authorities are inseparable.[437] Russian-linked organized crime in Estonia tries to take advantage of the relative absence of the Russian-speaking population in the country's governance.[438] By offering a "pseudo-patriotic" alternative to public authority, it sometimes tries to organize socio-economic

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432 Andres Anvelt, *Organiseeritud Kuritegevus* [Organized Crime] (Tallinn, Estonia: Sisekaitseakadeemia kirjastus, 2002), 16, http://dspace.ut.ee/bitstream/handle/10062/16258/Organiseeritud_kuritegevus.pdf?sequence=1.

433 Anvelt, *Organized Crime*, 16.

434 Toomas Mattson, "Vene Kuritegevus Õõnestab Eesti Julgeolekut, Kaitsepolitsei Hoiatab Narkootikumide, Relvade ja Tuumamaterjalide Transiidi Eest" [Russian Crime Undermines Estonia's Security, Internal Security Service Warns against the Transit of Drugs, Weapons, and Nuclear Materials], *Postimees*, April 14, 1997, https://www.postimees.ee/2505045/vene-kuritegevus-oonestab-eesti-julgeolekut-kaitsepolitsei-hoiatab-narkootikumide-relvade-ja-tuumamaterjalide-transiidi-eest.

435 Jüri Saar, "Venemaa Organiseeritud Kuritegevus ja Riiklus" [Russian Organized Crime and Statehood], *Sirp*, May 24, 2019, https://www.sirp.ee/s1-artiklid/c9-sotsiaalia/venemaa-organiseeritud-kuritegevus-ja-riiklus/.

436 Anvelt, 16.

437 Eerik Heldna, "Organiseeritud Kuritegevus: Rusikas Riigivõimu Taskus" [Organized Crime: A Fist in the Pocket of State Power], *Kaitse Kodu* 9, no. 3 (2019), 15, https://issuu.com/kaitse_kodu/docs/kaitse_kodu_03_2019_veeb/s/83978.

438 Anvelt, 17.

relations of the Russian-speaking community.[439] Russian special services are trying to take advantage of both right- and left-wing extremist movements through organized crime to provoke conflicts and fracture countries in Europe and also in America.[440] Russia has tried to do this in Estonia as well, especially in the first half of the 2000s, but EISS has quickly and effectively suppressed these movements.[441] As a result, extremists in Estonia have not been able to assert themselves, and therefore, extremism is not a significant threat to Estonia's national security.[442]

On the other hand, anti-Estonian cooperation between organized crime and Russian security authorities is ongoing in cross-border smuggling and human trafficking. Cross-border smuggling, as well as human trafficking, is a problem around the world. What makes it different in Estonia and the Baltics is that organized crime, in its operations on the state borders, is directly an extension and a tool of the Russian intelligence and security services.[443]

Individuals engaged in illegal cross-border activities, including dual citizens, are easy prey for the Russian special services—especially for the FSB, which includes the Russian Federation's border guard service.[444] Recruitment is also facilitated by Russian

[439] Anvelt, 17.

[440] Holzer, Laryš, and Mareš, *Militant Right-Wing Extremism in Putin's Russia*, 209.

[441] Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *2002 Aastaraamat* [Annual Review 2002], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2003), 12–15, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[442] Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2014* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2014], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2015), 6, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[443] Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2016* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2016], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2017), 14–15, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html; Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2017* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2017], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2018), 13, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html; Estonian Internal Security Service [Estonian Internal Security Service], *Kaitsepolitsei Aastaraamat 2019–20* [Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2019–20], (Tallinn, Estonia: Kaitsepolitseiamet, 2020), 27, https://kapo.ee/et/content/aastaraamatu-v%C3%A4ljaandmise-traditsiooni-ajalugu-ja-eesm%C3%A4rk-0.html.

[444] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2017*, 13,

propaganda and biased Russian media, which creates a "national-romantic" image for spies and treats them as heroes.[445] There is seemingly a symbiosis between criminals and intelligence services, where crime generates commercial profits, but the cost of doing so is also the performance of intelligence tasks.[446]

Furthermore, the criminals use technical means in their operations that are not readily available on the free market, suggesting that from time to time, their activities are likely to be directly supported by the Russian security services.[447] Press reports state that EISS has since 2015 arrested seven FSB collaborators involved in cross-border organized crime.[448] As a whole, their tasks were to gather information on the capabilities, personnel, activities, and equipment of the Estonian police, border guards, security agencies, the defense forces, and Estonia's allies active in Estonia.[449]

Criminals operating at the border have become experts in their activities in the region and the border area. As a result of their actions, they have probably learned in detail about the border landscape's peculiarities, the local population, and the road networks. They are also building safe-houses and supply caches and getting to know the operational routines and specifics of the Estonian border guard. All the nuances of operating on the Estonian-Russian border, both successful and unsuccessful, are likely to be passed on by criminals to the FSB as well. The FSB's tasks include gathering intelligence and coordinating criminal groups.[450] These tasks are often interlinked.[451] In a crisis, such long-term knowledge of the details of the border zone and the Estonian border guard's operating procedures is essential for the Russian special services in planning and conducting operations.

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[445] Estonian Internal Security Service, 13.

[446] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2019–20*, 27.

[447] Information is based on the author's professional experience.

[448] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2019–20*, 27.

[449] Estonian Internal Security Service, 27.

[450] Radin et al., *The Future of the Russian Military*, 222.

[451] Radin et al., 222.

It is important to point out that the Estonian region where the main smuggling and trafficking operations are carried out borders the Pskov region (Pskov oblast). This oblast is the most important outpost for Russian troops and special services on NATO member states' borders.[452] About fifty kilometers (thirty miles) from the Estonian-Russian border is the town of Pskov, home to the GRU 2nd Independent Spetsnaz Brigade and the 76th Airborne Assault Division. A former commander of the Estonian defense forces and current politician, retired General Ants Laaneots, said in 2014 that, according to his knowledge, the 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade units have been secretly practicing crossing the Estonian border for years.[453] According to Alexey Ramm, a Russian military correspondent and editor of military affairs in *Izvestia* newspaper, "The main role the [GRU] Spetsnaz units are now expected to perform is unconventional warfare operations authorized by the senior Russian leadership."[454] It is known from the conflict in Ukraine that Spetsnaz's agents and collaborators were recruited from, among others, criminal groups that were used with preparing a suitable environment for Russia's political goals.[455]

Private security companies also are linked to Russian intelligence. The GRU 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade has links, at least indirectly, with Wagner PMC. Their leader and founder, Dmitry Utkin, retired from the military as a lieutenant colonel in 2013, leaving as the commander of one of the units in the 2nd Spetsnaz Brigade.[456] It is known that Wagner PMC trains and builds its training facilities near the Spetsnaz brigades, and it is known that

[452] Andrei Kuzitškin and Toomas Randlo, "Andrei Kuzitškin: Väidetavalt Hoiatati Eston Kohvrit Juba 2014. Aasta Mais" [Andrei Kuzichkin: Eston Kohver Was Allegedly Warned as Early as May 2014], *Postimees*, August 2, 2015, https://arvamus.postimees.ee/3281035/andrei-kuzitskin-vaidetavalt-hoiatati-eston-kohvrit-juba-2014-aasta-mais.

[453] "Kõuts: Kui Eesti Ei Taasta Idapiiril Oma Kaitsevõimekust, Kasutatakse Meie Nõrkust Ära" [Kõuts: If Estonia Does Not Restore Its Defense Capabilities on the Eastern Border, Our Weakness Will Be Exploited], ERR, September 23, 2014, https://www.err.ee/520764/kouts-kui-eesti-ei-taasta-idapiiril-oma-kaitsevoimekust-kasutatakse-meie-norkust-ara.

[454] Alexey Ramm, "Russian Military Special Forces," in *Elite Warriors: Special Operations Forces from Around the World*, ed. Ruslan Pukhov and Christopher Marsh (Minneapolis, MN: East View Press, 2017), 8.

[455] United States Army Special Operations Command, *"Little Green Men,"* 43.

[456] Grzegorz Kuczyński, *Putin's Invisible Army* (Warsaw, Poland: Warsaw Institute, 2018), https://warsawinstitute.org/putins-invisible-army/.

through or initiated by the GRU, Russian PMCs operate alongside criminal groups.[457] Thus, it is possible that preparations have been made in the Russian-Estonian border zones for the possibility of infiltrating Estonia with supporting affiliate or proxy groups should the next conflict arise.

F.   CONCLUSION

The 2007 Bronze Soldier riots were among the first post-Soviet events in which Russia's influence and the exploitation of the local Russian-speaking diaspora created internal tensions abroad, and which Russia then exploited and tried to steer to its advantage without using military force. Russia's strategy in the context of the Bronze Soldier incident was successful in the sense that it is not possible to directly demonstrate or prove the Russian state's involvement and support in carrying out or leading the riots and concomitant activities such as cyber-attacks.[458] Thus, from this aspect, Russia's exploitation of non-state actors beneficial to the country, or at least the enabling of their actions, served the purpose in Estonia in 2007. Nevertheless, after provoking the riots and likely enabling the first-ever cyber-attacks against a foreign country, the Russian Federation was forced to admit that aggressively combined non-military means—information operations and propaganda, hostile local groups, cyber-attacks, and diplomatic pressure—were not enough to overthrow the Estonian government or change its political course.[459] Therefore, the Bronze Soldier case as a whole is an example of the relative failure of the Russian NWT against Estonia in 2007.

Aggressively combined non-military actors in the Estonian context seems to mean that non-state actors were simultaneously active in the same window of time, but there are minimal, if any, signs of coordination. Propaganda and influence campaigns in the media

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[457] Bowen, *Russian Private Military Companies (PMCs)*; Candace Rondeaux, *Decoding the Wagner Group: Analyzing the Role of Private Military Security Contractors in Russian Proxy Warfare*, (Washington, DC: New America, 2019), 52, https://d1y8sb8igg2f8e.cloudfront.net/documents/Decoding_the_Wagner_Group.pdf.

[458] Pezard, Migacheva, and Allen, *Russia's Hostile Measures*, 56–57.

[459] Juurvee and Mattiisen, *The Bronze Soldier Crisis of 2007,* 30–31; "The EU Promises to Help in Solving the Situation at the Estonian Embassy in Moscow," Estonian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, May 1, 2007, https://vm.ee/en/news/eu-promises-help-solving-situation-estonian-embassy-moscow.

divided the Estonian population and culminated in street riots. The anti-Estonian narratives, repeated in the press, also probably supported finding people who took part in cyber-attacks according to instructions shared on the Internet. Russia's general strategy in Estonia created a so-called favorable ground, where the accumulation of tensions formed a number of people whose general goal seemed to be to release their anger and retaliate against Estonia and its government. It seems to the author that there was no follow-up plan after the starting of the street riots. Russian security agencies may have involved the cyber-attacks through cyber criminals because the right environment or opportunity arose to test their impact and capabilities, creating additional confusion and overburdening the target country's governing bodies. Therefore, it seems to the author that the Bronze Soldier case in Estonia was the testing of NTW components, the aim of which was to see whether non-state actors supporting Russia's foreign policy goals could independently achieve a goal suitable for Russia without Russia's direct command and control.

The conflict mainly involved the Estonian capital, Tallinn, and smaller towns in eastern Estonia closer to Russian border. Its active phase was relatively short-lived, and Estonian law-enforcement and security structures were able to quell and resolve the crisis. However, it showed that an influencing strategy of Russian origin could initiate a domestic social conflict in Estonia through information and cyber operations. Although the rioters became violent on the streets, their actions were improvised and accidental, and the organizers of the protests were unable to direct the events systematically. Russia did not use organized violent and armed non-state actors against Estonia. On the other hand, if systematically operating armed groups had also supported rioters, the Bronze Soldier case could have ended differently.

Despite the successful result for Estonia, it can be said that the unresolved causes of the Bronze Soldier incident, the impacts of the events, and the lessons learned by Russia that it continues to develop and apply in Estonia, have left the case open. After 2007, Russia has continued its malign information and influence campaigns attempting to divide Estonian society. As the influencing techniques that caused the crisis worked in 2007, Russia continues to use them and hinder the integration of Estonians and Russian-speakers living in Estonia through state-controlled media, journalists, influence agents, and NGOs.

The policy to integrate Estonians and Russian-speakers continues to pose challenges for Estonia. In turn, this situation leaves open the possibility that the discrepancy between nationalities and the resulting historical memory can be re-used in Estonia to create a next conflict similar to the Bronze Soldier case. It is possible that to create a new conflict, Russia will just have to find a new symbol that can be historically interpreted in many ways, around which to build a new campaign of subversion.

Possible Russian efforts to prepare local violent auxiliary groups, such as knife fighters, shows that their participation should already be taken as a given in the next similar crisis in Estonia. Also, cooperation between organized crime and Russian intelligence agencies at the state-border indicates that should the next crisis arise, Russia is likely to have prepared for escalation using these actors and their preparations at the border. Their cooperation can be the groundwork to enable additional Russian proxy, affiliate, and auxiliary forces to infiltrate Estonia to support locals in a crisis.

IV. MONTENEGRO

A. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a case study of Russian NTW activities in Montenegro, a small mountainous country on the Adriatic Sea in the Balkans. Montenegro was one of Yugoslavia's federal republics until 2003. From 2003 to 2006, the country was a part of Serbia and Montenegro. Montenegro became independent as a result of a referendum in 2006 and has been a member of NATO since 2017. The Balkan countries have a historical connection with Russia, and Moscow still considers the region as within its sphere of influence. In order to increase and consolidate its influence and ability to direct processes in the Balkans, Russia is trying by all means to counter the expansion of Western power into the region. This is best illustrated by the failed Russian-sponsored coup attempt in Montenegro in 2016.

The second section of this chapter introduces the reader to Montenegro's geographical location and briefly describes the state structure. In order to better understand the reasons for the 2016 coup attempt, the author describes the relations between Montenegrins and Serbs and how they affected the events in the region and Montenegro's accession to NATO. The section then describes how Russia is trying to consolidate its influence in the Balkans and the reasons that led to the failed coup attempt in 2016 to prevent Montenegro from joining NATO.

The third section first briefly explains the events and environment immediately preceding the planned coup. It then describes which actors were involved in planning, organizing, and attempting to carry out the coup. This section also provides an overview of how the coup was planned and what activities were planned. Finally, this section describes why the planned coup attempt did not materialize.

The fourth section first analyzes Russia's influence in the region before the failed coup attempt in Montenegro, specifically what methods and pro-Kremlin non-state actors it used in its attempts to achieve its goals. The following part analyzes how Russia used the media in its influencing strategies and which local pro-Russian actors took part in these

activities. Third, the section examines the cyber-attacks, which were the only activities carried out against Montenegro on its referendum day, when the coup attempt was to occur. The fourth part of the section investigates the Russian state service behind the coup plot, the GRU and its two officers from the covert unit 29155, who were the coup planners, financiers, and initiators. The final part of this section analyzes the violent pro-Russian auxiliary, affiliate, and criminal proxy actors involved in the planned coup and their background, reasons to be involved, and roles.

The last section of the chapter summarizes the reason, the plan, and the preparation of non-state actors for the coup, which was intended to overthrow the Montenegrin government and suspend NATO accession. The section concludes that the Russian NTW campaign in Montenegro in 2016 was a failure resulting from one weak link, as one of the coup plotters became an informant for the Montenegrin police.

B. MONTENEGRO'S GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION, STATE STRUCTURE, POPULATION, AND NATO MEMBERSHIP

Montenegro is a parliamentary republic. Independent executive, legislative, and judicial authorities govern the state. The president is the head of state, who is directly elected for five years. The prime minister chairs Montenegro's unicameral parliament. The state's judicial system includes the Constitutional Court and a Supreme Court.[460]

Montenegro has a population of approximately 610,000, 45 percent of whom are Montenegrin, 29 percent Serbian, 9 percent Bosnian, and other nationalities such as Albanian, Muslim, Romani, and Croat. About 5 percent of the population is of unspecified origin.[461]

Formerly, Montenegro was a member state of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. After the union's collapse, Montenegro joined its neighboring state Serbia to

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[460] John B. Allcock, "Montenegro," Britannica, last modified October 7, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/place/Montenegro.

[461] "The World Factbook. Europe: Montenegro," Central Intelligence Agency, November 6, 2020, https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/mj.html.

establish the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992.[462] From 2003 to 2006, Montenegro was part of a federal union with Serbia.[463] After gaining its independence in a peaceful nationwide referendum in 2006, Montenegro's political leadership set Western integration a priority in the state's constitution.[464] As well as establishing a stable economy, NATO membership became one of Montenegro's primary goals.[465] Montenegro joined the Partnership for Peace in December 2006, and became a full member of NATO in June 2017.[466]

While most of Montenegro's population supports the state's integration into the EU and a consensus has also been reached among politicians, NATO membership has divided both citizens and politicians.[467] Some Montenegrins see the future of their state in close connection and cooperation with the democratic West, while others favor an alliance with the Russian Federation. Many emphasize the importance of their own statehood. These people favor maximal autonomy from Serbia, while others in Montenegro favor close relations with Serbia, which they still consider a "mother country."[468]

1.   Russia's Interests in the Balkans and Montenegro

As previously noted, Russia considers the Balkans to be part of its sphere of influence. Therefore, it is trying to counter any expansion of Western influence in the region, as this will reduce its own power in the area.[469] Russia's central informational

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[462] Reuf Bajrović, Vesko Garčević, and Richard Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread: Russia's Strategy of Destabilization in Montenegro* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2018), 6, https://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/kraemer-rfp5.pdf.

[463] Allcock, "Montenegro."

[464] Ivana Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro: How and Why a Centuries Old Relationship Ruptured* (London, UK: Global Center for Security Studies, 2018), 5, http://www.gc4ss.org/mon-rus.pdf.

[465] Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 5.

[466] "Relations with Montenegro (Archived)," NATO, December 14, 2017, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49736.htm.

[467] Grigorij Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell: Elections in Montenegro as a Mirror of Russian Policy in the Balkans," Visegrad Insight, September 29, 2020, https://visegradinsight.eu/montenegro-elections-russia-time-will-tell/.

[468] Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

[469] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 6.

method of consolidating its presence in the Balkans is exploiting the ultranationalist emotions in pan-Slavism and eastern Orthodoxy—a concept that "suggests that borders are irrelevant to the transcendent need to unite ethnic [Slavic peoples and Orthodox faithful]."[470] By emphasizing the Russian empire's historical role in protecting and uniting the Slavic world and people, Moscow can display its role as the region's guardian from the outer non-Slavic influences.[471] Moscow is trying to implement the narrative in the Balkans that "only Russian president Vladimir Putin is the true "defender of the faith," and all that is culturally traditional and conservative."[472]

With a broad emphasis on Slavic heritage, a common Orthodox Christian religion, and Russia's historical patriarchal role in the region, the Russian leadership is primarily committed to exploiting ethnic Serbs to achieve its goals and secure its presence.[473] Almost 30 percent of Montenegro's population is ethnic Serbs. Most of them identify with their Slavic heritage and support the concept of a Greater Serbia, in which all ethnic Serbs would be unified into one state and territory. As Russia has promoted itself as Serbia's ally, these Serbian-Montenegrins support stronger relations with Moscow.[474]

In 2013–2014, Russia began to show increased interest in Montenegro compared to other Balkan countries due to Montenegro's geographical location.[475] The state's ports of Bar and Kotor provide deep-sea access to the Mediterranean.[476] At the time, Russia had lost confidence in its naval base in Tartus, Syria, and without a reliable port for its navy in the eastern Mediterranean, Russia's strategic capabilities in the region were hindered.[477]

[470] Heather A. Conley and Matthew Melino, *Russian Malign Influence in Montenegro* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2019), 2–3, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/190514_ConleyandMelino_RussianInfluence_layout_v2.pdf.; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 6.

[471] Conley and Melino, *Russian Malign Influence in Montenegro*, 3.

[472] Conley and Melino, 1.

[473] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 6.

[474] Conley and Melino, 3; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 6.

[475] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 7–8.

[476] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 7.

[477] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 7.

In September 2013, Moscow requested a meeting with the Montenegrin ministry of defense to discuss establishing a Russian naval base in Montenegro.[478] Anna Borshchevskaya notes that "a port allows a country to project power and support military operations. Russian naval presence in the Eastern Mediterranean helps protect against a possible blockade seeking to punish or topple the Bashar al-Assad government in Damascus."[479] In 2013, Montenegro refused Russia's request to use its deep-water ports temporarily to moor Russian warships.[480]

By 2016, Moscow had not yet made any measurable progress in achieving military cooperation with Montenegro.[481] Montenegro's joining NATO closed even the theoretical possibility that Russia would have a friendly route to the Mediterranean via the Adriatic Sea from the Balkans.[482] Politically, Montenegro's vigorous approach to the West and joining this military organization thwarted regional ethnic Serbian aspirations to create Greater Serbia and Moscow's efforts to increase its influence in the Balkans.[483]

C.   THE 2016 COUP ATTEMPT

On election day, October 16, 2016, then prime minister Djukanovic announced that the previous day, twenty individuals had been arrested by Montenegrin special services for planning a coup d'état in Montenegro and his likely assassination.[484] According to Montenegro's chief special prosecutor Milivoje Katnić, the intended coup involved Serbian, Russian, and Montenegrin citizens and aimed to change Montenegro's political system, and thus prevent the state from joining NATO.[485]

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[478] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer *Hanging by a Thread*,

[479] Quoted in Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 8.

[480] Conley and Melino, *Russian Malign Influence in Montenegro*, 3.

[481] Damir Marusic, "Did Moscow Botch a Coup in Montenegro?" American Interest, October 30, 2016, https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/10/30/did-moscow-botch-a-coup-in-montenegro/.

[482] Marusic, "Did Moscow Botch a Coup in Montenegro?"

[483] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 7.

[484] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"

[485] Grozev; "Đukanović Bio Na Meti Dvojice Rusa, Bili Su u Srbiji.." [Djukanovic Was the Target of Two Russians, They Were in Serbia...], RTV B92, November 7, 2016, https://www.b92.net/info/vesti/index.php?yyyy=2016&mm=11&dd=07&nav_category=167&nav_id=1196567.

1. Immediate Events and Environment Leading to Failed Coup Attempt

On December 2, 2015, the NATO military alliance invited Montenegro to start accession talks.[486] As Montenegro was Russia's main potential ally through which Russia could have gained access to the Mediterranean, Russia's response was swift, and on the same day, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov threatened Russia's retaliatory steps if Montenegro joined NATO.[487] The Russian parliament threatened Montenegro that all cooperation projects, including defense cooperation, would be frozen if Montenegro entered the Western military organization.[488] Despite these Russian threats, then Montenegrin prime minister Milo Djukanovic signed an accession protocol with NATO in May 2016.[489]

Starting the NATO accession process was a political decision in Montenegro, which was controversial from the people's point of view, as up to half of the country's population was opposed to joining NATO, according to various estimates.[490] The parliamentary elections in October 2016 were considered a referendum on joining the Euro-Atlantic military alliance, which had been agreed upon in advance but had not yet entered into force. The Montenegrin parliament needed to ratify the treaty for it to come into force.[491] If the opposition had won this election, the country's accession to NATO would have been suspended on Montenegro's own initiative.[492]

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[486] NATO, "Relations with Montenegro."

[487] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"; "Kremlin Says NATO Expansion to East Will Lead to Retaliation from Russia," Reuters, December 2, 2015, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-kremlin-nato-expansion-idUSKBN0TL0V720151202; "Djukanovic: Montenegro Has Right to Follow Own Interests in Moving West," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 16, 2015, https://www.rferl.org/a/montenegro-djukanovic-nato-membership-russia/27431378.html.

[488] Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, "Djukanovic: Montenegro Has Right to Follow Own Interests In Moving West."

[489] NATO.

[490] Grozev.

[491] Andrew E. Kramer and Joseph Orovic, "Two Suspected Russian Agents among 14 Convicted in Montenegro Coup Plot," *New York Times*, May 9, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/09/world/europe/montenegro-coup-plot-gru.html; Marusic, "Did Moscow Botch a Coup in Montenegro?"

[492] Marusic.

2. The Coup Attempt Planners and Organizers

Behind the coup attempt plan were two GRU officers, Eduard Shishmakov (alias Eduard Shirokov) and Vladimir Moiseev (alias Vladimir Popov), who recruited Serbian citizen Aleksandar Sindjelic as the plot's main organizer.[493] Sindjelic, a convicted criminal who had fought on the separatists' side in eastern Ukraine, was the leader of an anti-NATO and pro-Kremlin paramilitary group, the Serb Wolves, and a member of another, the Balkan Cossack Army (BCA).[494]

Sindjelic, in turn, hired a former chief of Serbia's special police and BCA member, Bratislav Dikic, and recruited Montenegrin resident Mirko Velimirovic. Sindjelic and Dikic formed a criminal group that would play the primary role in the assassination of then-prime minister Djukanovic and by doing so help to seize power in Montenegro. Velimirovic's task was to obtain weaponry from Kosovo, participate in the coup, and recruit additional cooperators from Montenegro to take part in the coup's riots.[495] In addition to those directly participating in the kinetic operations, almost five hundred conspirators were planned, recruited, or involved to participate in the coup.[496]

The coup plan, however, did not materialize because Velimirovic became a police informant a few days before election day.[497] Through Velimirovic, Montenegrin security forces arrested Sindjelic and Dikic and, on election day, the remaining principal perpetrators, with the exception of two GRU officers.[498]

3. The Coup Plan

The coup plan had been to hold an anti-government demonstration in front of the parliament building on referendum day, October 16, and to infiltrate the protest with armed,

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[493] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"; Moritz Rakuszitzky, "Second GRU Officer Indicted in Montenegro Coup Unmasked," Bellingcat, November 22, 2018, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2018/11/22/second-gru-officer-indicted-montenegro-coup-unmasked/.

[494] Grozev; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 10–11.

[495] Grozev.

[496] Grozev; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 11.

[497] Grozev.

[498] Grozev.

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trained, and conflict zone-experienced operators.[499] Some of the operators were to be dressed in Montenegrin police uniforms.[500] Then, after the elections at eleven in the evening, two politicians, Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević, leaders of the Montenegrin anti-NATO and pro-Russian Democratic Front, were to step up and trigger the crowds to start the riots and provoke them to assail the parliament.[501] Under the guise of protesting crowds, armed groups that had infiltrated the public were to forcibly break into the parliament building.[502] Meanwhile, at the start of the unrest, the operators disguised in police uniforms were to start the 'false-flag' operation by shooting at the opposition supporters and demonstrators as if they were the "government's police units."[503] The Democratic Front would then instigate widespread national protests, accusing the government of killing innocent people and claiming that the government's brutality was an effort to counter the "victorious" opposition from taking control.[504] At the same time, armed groups that were to break into the parliament building were to assassinate then-prime minister Djukanovic and subsequently keep the building under control for at least forty-eight hours.[505] Eventually, the groups that occupied the building would have handed over responsibility to the pro-Kremlin Democratic Front, which would have changed Montenegro's foreign policy and suspended its negotiations to join NATO.[506]

On May 9, 2019, the Montenegrin Supreme Court convicted a group of fourteen people of attempted terrorism and the creation of a criminal organization that aimed to assassinate the prime minister, overthrow the Montenegrin government, and prevent it from

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[499] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 9.

[500] Grozev; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer.

[501] Grozev; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer.

[502] Grozev; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer.

[503] Marusic, "Did Moscow Botch a Coup in Montenegro?"; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 9.

[504] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer; Conley and Melino, *Russian Malign Influence in Montenegro*, 3.

[505] Grozev; RTV B92, "Djukanovic Was the Target of Two Russians, They Were in Serbia.."

[506] Grozev.

joining NATO.[507] Two GRU officers, Shishmakov and Moiseev, who managed to escape through neighboring Serbia, were sentenced in absentia to fifteen and twelve years in prison, respectively, but it is unlikely they will serve their terms.[508] Two Montenegrin opposition politicians, Mandić and Knežević, were both sentenced to five years in jail, and the other sentences varied from parole to eight years in prison.[509]

The next section of this chapter takes a closer look at Russian state and non-state actors, as well as local auxiliaries, affiliates, and proxies involved in the planned coup. The following section examines the means Russia used to sow its influence in the region to distinguish groups of people suitable for pursuing Moscow's interests. The section also analyses how non-state actors were connected with Russia and with each other, and what their activities were in planning the coup.

D. ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN AIMS AND USE OF STATE AND NON-STATE ACTORS IN THE PLANNED COUP

The Russian Federation has sought to keep the Balkan countries in its sphere of influence, expand its capacity in the region to direct the various state processes, and prevent Western countries from expanding their influence into the region. As the Montenegrin government took a decisive step towards the West and planned to join the NATO military alliance, Russia saw a dangerous sign of Western power expansion into the Balkans. Also, Montenegro's decision deprived Russia of the opportunity to gain naval access from the Balkans to the Mediterranean. For these reasons, Moscow tried to prevent Montenegro from moving towards the West and joining NATO.

As noted earlier, on October 16, 2016, the day of the local parliamentary elections, Russia, through its agents in Montenegro and Serbia, attempted a violent coup d'etat, under

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[507] Kramer and Orovic, "Two Suspected Russian Agents among 14 Convicted in Montenegro Coup Plot"; "Russian GRU Agents Found Guilty of Attempted Montenegro Coup," *Warsaw Institute*, May 9, 2019, https://warsawinstitute.org/russian-gru-agents-found-guilty-attempted-montenegro-coup/.

[508] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"; Kramer and Orovic, "Two Suspected Russian Agents among 14 Convicted in Montenegro Coup Plot"

[509] Kramer and Orovic.

the guise of a bogus "popular uprising," to prevent a pro-Western election victory.[510] The Russian Federation's strategy in the Montenegrin capital, Podgorica, was very similar to its previously conducted activities in Ukraine, as it involved the occupation of a government building by local pro-Russian actors, as in Donbas in eastern Ukraine.[511]

In attempts to achieve its goals in Montenegro, Russia relied on all distinctions of violent non-state actors—affiliates, auxiliaries, and proxies. As described in Chapter II, affiliates have a symbiotic and formal but legally questionable relationship with the sponsoring state steering the activities. Affiliates are often mercenaries formed into private or contract units capable of independent influence campaigns, violent operations, and power projection. Auxiliaries, by contrast, are armed or violent ideologically driven and motivated volunteers that are not part of the sponsoring state's formal units but are directly engaging in violent activities in the operating environment in favor of the sponsoring state. The third group, proxies, comprises third-party agents whose interests align with the state sponsor's aims. They can be ideologically supportive of the sponsoring state, but the main reason for their involvement in the conflict is their own interests, like grievances against another group in the target state.

1. Russian Influence Strategy Before the Planned Coup in 2016 and Implementing Auxiliary and Proxy Actors

Before the coup attempt, there was no direct and coordinated campaign of influence to divide the people, as the Montenegrin population was itself deeply polarized. As early as 2006, the referendum on the independence from Serbia clearly highlighted the Montenegrin population's segregation into Montenegrins and Serbs based on their ethnic and linguistic background.[512] In 2006, 44.5 percent of the population voted against secession from Serbia.[513] As a result Russia easily found groups among the people of the region who were ready to take decisive action in halting the spread of Western influence

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[510] Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

[511] Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

[512] Mesežnikov; Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 6.

[513] Mesežnikov.

in the region. Russian and the local pro-Kremlin auxiliary and affiliate actors had a favorable opportunity to direct opponents, mainly Serbs, of Montenegro's independence and pro-Westernism against joining NATO.

Russia's long-standing influencing plan before the coup d'état did not directly aim at Montenegro but the Balkan region in general.[514] The primary strategy of influence was to emphasize pan-Slavism and to highlight, amplify, and link Serbian nationalism to the Russian nation that allegedly shares similar values. As a result, all others in the region, who did not support these values, could in themselves be portrayed as opponents and even as "enemies," advocates for Western interests. As the Russians saw during the preparatory period for the coup, social divisions and the resulting beliefs among the Balkan nations were sufficiently sharp that ethnic Serb auxiliary actors were willing to go extremes to "protect" the region.

In an attempt to renew and demonstrate the Russian empire's historical role in protecting the Slavic world, and continuously opposing it with the West, Russia sought to demonstrate its role as a defender of the region from Western expansion and the West's so-called harmful influence.[515] To depict the so-called common Russian world, to consolidate its influence, and to build a nation-based bridge, in addition to emphasizing ethnic inheritance, Russia also needed to bring another essential element into play—the Orthodox Church. Around 2010, the Russian Orthodox Church began working closely with the influential Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro, which resulted in the construction of three Russian Orthodox churches in the country.[516] This cooperation was one of the cornerstones of anti-Western and anti-NATO advocacy, leading to more apparent opposition movements.[517]

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[514] Conley and Melino, *Russian Malign Influence in Montenegro*, 1–3; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 6.

[515] Conley and Melino, 3.

[516] Draško Đuranović, "Kad Moskva Pozove" [When Moscow Calls], *Portal Analitika*, April 16, 2014, http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/142605/kad-moskva-pozove.

[517] Đuranović, "When Moscow Calls"; Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 6.

The Serbian Orthodox Church leader in Montenegro, Archbishop Amfilohije Radović, positioned himself as one of the leading figures in the anti-NATO campaign.[518] Radović became an influential Russian auxiliary figure in the region that used his links and cooperation with Russian representatives in Montenegro and Serbia to block Montenegro's path to the Western military alliance.[519] He became a distinguished visitor at various events committed to Montenegro's military neutrality concept and the holding of a referendum on joining NATO.[520] In May 2016, he gave an official blessing to a declaration signed between the Montenegrin political opposition Democratic Front and the United Party of Russia, led by president Putin.[521] The author describes this event in more depth in the following paragraphs related to Montenegrin pro-Kremlin political actors.

While the Serbian Orthodox Church was not directly involved in the coup attempt, it hosted a meeting of coup leaders in the Montenegrin Ostrog monastery the night before it was supposed to take place.[522] The Serbian Orthodox Church is known for its support for Serbian nationalists and continues to have a strong influence in Montenegro, where three-quarters of the population is Orthodox.[523] The Serbian Orthodox Church provides political and financial support and logistical assistance to Montenegro's anti-Western and anti-NATO forces.[524]

In June 2014, the Serbian Church inducted former KGB and SVR General Leonid Reshetnikov into the Order of the Holy Emperor Constantine for "nurturing and spreading of Orthodoxy." Reshetnikov was then director of the Kremlin-owned Russian Institute for

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[518] Gardasevic, 6.

[519] Gardasevic *Russia and Montenegro*, 6.

[520] Gardasevic, 6.

[521] "Uz Blagoslov Mitropolita Amfilohija Potpisana Lovćenska Deklaracija" [The Lovćen Declaration Was Signed with the Blessing of Metropolitan Amfilohije], Demokratska Narodna Partija [Democratic People's Party], May 6, 2016, http://www.dnpcg.me/uz-blagoslov-mitropolita-amfilohija-potpisana-lovcenska-deklaracija/.

[522] Nicole Ely, "Balkans Should Beware of Putin's Night-Time Bikers," *Balkan Insight*, June 28, 2019, https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/28/balkans-should-beware-of-putins-night-time-bikers-2/; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 11.

[523] Ely, "Balkans Should Beware of Putin's Night-Time Bikers"; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 11.

[524] Ely; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 11.

Strategic Studies (RISS).[525] RISS is a Russian affiliate organization that, in addition to promoting the Kremlin's foreign policy goals in the Balkans, also consolidates and supports influence agents and finances anti-NATO groups in the region.[526]

Reshetnikov was one of the strongest public critics of Montenegro's movement towards NATO and committed RISS to intensively analyze and comment on Montenegro's political situation before the referendum in October 2016.[527] For example, in February 2016, Nikita Bondarev, head of the RISS Balkan Research Group, predicted a scenario for the upcoming referendum: protesting masses trying to break into the parliament building; police using violence and showering them with tear gas and rubber bullets; nevertheless, protesters against then-prime minister Djukanovic would not recede.[528] Bondarev emphasized that "in order for the decision that Djukanovic is undesirable to be taken, the process of protest activity in Montenegro must move to a slightly different stage. Now these are generally peaceful protests, but they can develop into something similar to what happened in Kiev on the Maidan."[529] As it turned out, these 'predictions' described quite precisely what events were to take place in about eight months, in Podgorica, Montenegro's capital.

In addition to organizing and directing Russia's influence strategy in the area, Reshetnikov was probably one of those who originally proposed the idea of a coup in Montenegro.[530] Also, Reshetnikov possibly played a role as an advisor in the preparations

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[525] ""BRAĆA PO SPC ORDENJU": Vujanović, Rešetnjikov, Velja Ilić" ["BROTHERS BY SOC ORDER": Vujanovic, Reshetnikov, Velja Ilic], *Portal Analitika*, June 4, 2014, http://www.portalanalitika.me/clanak/148996/arhiv; Christo Grozev, "The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part I," Bellingcat, March 4, 2017, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2017/03/04/kremlins-balkan-gambit-part/.

[526] Mark Galeotti, *Controlling Chaos: How Russia Manages Its Political War in Europe,* ECFR/228 (London, UK: European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017), 5, https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR228_-_CONTROLLING_CHAOS1.pdf.

[527] Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 6; Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

[528] "Budushchee Cernogorii: tri veroiatnykh" [The Future of Montenegro: Three Likely Scenarios], Rossiiskii Insitut Strategicheckikh Issledovanii [Russian Institute for Strategic Studies, RISS], last modified January 25, 2016, https://riss.ru/smi/25599/.

[529] RISS, "The Future of Montenegro: Three Likely Scenarios."

[530] Grozev.

phase.[531] He offered likely candidates for executing the coup to Moscow, after which authorities under the Kremlin's direct control, such as the GRU, were given responsibility for planning and directing the plot.[532] Less than a month after the failed coup came to light, President Putin removed Reshetnikov from his position as director of RISS and replaced him with Mikhail Fradkov, the former director-general of the SVR.[533] The replacement of Reshetnikov to the former head of the SVR indicates that the Russian leadership considers the RISS and its director's position to be crucial tools in Russia's strategy for influencing the Balkans. President Putin's involvement also shows that the RISS is directly linked to the Kremlin's pursuit of agendas in the region, and Putin saw that Reshetnikov failed in his duties.

Reshetnikov's close Russian-linked contact with whom he cooperated in the Balkans and likely developed the coup's idea was the oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, an infamous Russian affiliate from the Ukraine conflict.[534] Malofeev was known to be one of the original ideologues and organizers of the occupation of Crimea and had funded and supervised at least two of Russia's prominent affiliate leaders of the separatist activities in eastern Ukraine, former FSB colonel Igor Girkin and Alexander Boroday.[535] While Malofeev's activities in the Balkans, as in Ukraine, were seemingly motivated by ideological and business interests, in reality he coordinated his activities with Moscow through RISS and Reshetnikov.[536] According to an unspecified Bulgarian intelligence officer, "Malofeev, [who was] very active on both economic acquisitions and political networking in the Balkans since 2014, originated the idea to attempt a coup in Montenegro in 2016. But this ultimately was too big for him to be allowed to be in charge, and Security Council chief Nikolai Patrushev—with Putin's approval—took it over."[537]

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[531] Grozev.

[532] Grozev.

[533] Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 6; Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

[534] Grozev, "The Kremlin's Balkan Gambit: Part I."

[535] Grozev.

[536] Grozev.

[537] Quoted in Galeotti, *Putin's Controlling Chaos*, 9.

Nevertheless, in the months leading up to the coup, Malofeev worked under Kremlin active-measures guidelines and tried to increase the proportion of NATO opponents in Montenegro and the region. Malofeev, like Reshetnikov, had close connections with both the Serbian Orthodox Church and the Montenegrin political opposition, the Democratic Front.[538] In 2016, Malofeev's Russian-located Tsargrad TV station provided a large amount of airtime to the Democratic Front leaders Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević.[539] For example, in an interview in February 2016, Mandic said that in the absence of a referendum on joining NATO, the country would face large-scale street protests and violence.[540] In the same interview, Mandic said that the Russian Duma speaker, Sergei Naryshkin, had promised him that forces representing Russian interests in Montenegro could count on Russia's support.[541]

2. Pro-Russian Media and Local Proxy Actors

Montenegro and Serbia are viewed as some of the European countries least prepared to detect and reject false news due to backward knowledge systems and weak political literacy.[542] From 2015 onwards, the number of media outlets and local websites with Russian background increased in Montenegro and Serbia, often taking information directly from, for example, Sputnik or other Russian media sources.[543] The messages conveyed through these channels systematically called for ethnic Serbs in Serbia, Montenegro, North Kosovo, and Bosnia's Republika Srpska to form a unified political

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[538] Dimitar Bechev, *The 2016 Coup Attempt in Montenegro: Is Russia's Balkans Footprint Expanding?* (Philadelphia, PA: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2018), http://www.fpri.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/BechevFinal2018.pdf, 12; Grozev.

[539] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

[540] Grozev.

[541] Grozev.

[542] Paul Stronski and Annie Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2019), 8, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Stronski_Himes_Balkans_formatted.pdf.

[543] Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 8.

body with a tight connection to Russia.[544] These efforts were successful in dividing the Montenegrin public.

As with the 2006 independence referendum, Montenegro's population and politicians split in two on the question of joining NATO.[545] The main proxy actors in representing NATO opponents were opposition politicians and Democratic Front leaders Mandić and Knežević. They were Russian proxy actors because they acted out of self-interest in order to rise to power in Montenegro. They were both involved in the planned coup, and they had to seize power in the country to make Montenegro's political direction favorable for Russia.[546] The main role of Mandić and Knežević was to coordinate the coup organizers and assist in the distribution of funds.[547]

In the period leading to Montenegro's referendum, regional pro-Russian or Kremlin-supported media actively highlighted local suspicion the West and pro-Western Balkan politicians.[548] One of the directions of Russian influencing strategy before the coup was to portray Montenegro as a "traitor" and to threaten the state with severe retaliatory actions in the event of joining NATO.[549] This campaign aimed to sow fear and confusion. The pro-Kremlin media used previously proven and successful propaganda tactics to influence Montenegrins to tilt in an anti-NATO direction, beneficial to Russia.[550] The message of Russian propaganda was that Montenegro would become the next Ukraine.[551] Following the Ukraine events of 2014, Russian propaganda and influencing strategy succeeded in creating a negative image of Ukraine and its people in Russia and many countries supporting Russia.[552] The image created of Ukrainians depicted them as

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544 Stronski and Himes.

545 Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

546 Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2"; Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 8–9.

547 Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 10.

548 Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 8.

549 Gardasevic, 7; Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

550 Mesežnikov.

551 Mesežnikov.

552 Mesežnikov.

"ungrateful, apostate, heading to the West, and in denial of their common historical roots with Russia."[553]

Another focus of Russian influencing before the coup was the ongoing denigration and discrediting of the West and NATO. Anti-Western propaganda regularly presented the West as the origin of the region's democratic shortcomings, economic problems, and continuing ethnic divisions.[554] Russian-led propaganda emphasized and ridiculed European values for protecting minorities and LGBT rights and claimed that America was known for supporting ethnic separatism and dividing the Balkan countries.[555] Fake news of Russian origin or having links to Russia regularly highlighted the narrative that Western decision makers prefer to support Muslim communities in the Balkans at Orthodox Christians' expense.[556]

In October 2015, one year before the planned coup, the Democratic Front staged a large-scale protest against the prime minister and joining NATO.[557] In 2016, the Montenegrin prime minister accused opposition leaders Mandić and Knežević of receiving financial support from the Russian Federation to organize both the 2015 protest and the one planned for the 2016 coup.[558] In February 2016, eight months before the planned coup, Mandić and Knežević traveled to Moscow to receive instructions from their Russian donors and mentors.[559] They discussed with the senior official of United Party of Russia, Sergey

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[553] Mesežnikov.

[554] Stronski and Himes, 8.

[555] Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 8.

[556] Stronski and Himes, 8.

[557] Gardasevic, *Russia and Montenegro*, 7.

[558] Aleksandar Vasovic, "Montenegro PM Accuses Russia of Financing Anti-NATO Campaign," Reuters, October 13, 2016, http://www.reuters.com/article/us-montenegro-election-idUSKCN12D2QV; Gardasevic, 8.

[559] "Mandić: Iscenirani, Skandalozni Državni Udar u Organizaciji Đukanovića Produbio Krizu u CG" [Mandic: The Staged, Scandalous Coup d'etat Organized by Djukanovic Deepened the Crisis in Montenegro], *Portal Vijesti*, December 2, 2016, https://www.vijesti.me/vijesti/politika/103425/mandic-iscenirani-skandalozni-drzavni-udar-u-organizaciji-dukanovica-produbio-krizu-u-cg.

Zelezniak, and the vice president of the Russian parliament, Pyotr Tolstoy, about the upcoming referendum strategy and other possible pro-Russian political moves.[560]

In May 2016, five months before the planned coup, Knežević signed, with the blessing of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Montenegro Archbishop Radović, the Lovćen declaration on the partnership between the Democratic Front of Montenegro and the United Party of Russia.[561] This declaration emphasized and clarified improving connections between the two countries, establishing an agreement of military-neutrality, and holding a referendum on joining the Western military alliance.[562]

Russia's widespread propaganda and defamation campaign targeting Montenegro's government, aimed at influencing the public. The campaign mainly began after the failed coup attempt. The Russian media and news channels, which in turn are covered by pro-Kremlin Balkan publications, portrayed Montenegro as a wholly corrupt and criminal-run country with no law and order; Montenegro was depicted as violating the fundamental rights and religious freedom of the population.[563] The Russian media also portrayed Montenegro as a country openly hostile to Russia, claiming Montenegro acted as a Western puppet.[564] This campaign aimed to discredit the Montenegrin government and continue to increase support for the opposition to reverse the process of joining NATO.

3. Cyber-Attacks in the Coup Attempt

From the beginning of 2016, the Montenegrin authorities recorded a sharp increase in the number of cyber-attacks, targeting mainly public authorities and the media.[565] For

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[560] *Portal Vijesti*, "Mandic: The Staged, Scandalous Coup d'etat Organized by Djukanovic Deepened the Crisis in Montenegro."

[561] Democratic People's Party, "The Lovćen Declaration was signed with the blessing of Metropolitan Amfilohije."

[562] Democratic People's Party, "The Lovćen Declaration was signed with the blessing of Metropolitan Amfilohije."

[563] Mesežnikov, "Time Will Tell."

[564] Mesežnikov.

[565] Dusica Tomovic and Maja Zivanovic, "Russia's Fancy Bear Hacks its Way into Montenegro," *Balkan Insight*, last modified March 5, 2018, https://balkaninsight.com/2018/03/05/russia-s-fancy-bear-hacks-its-way-into-montenegro-03-01-2018/.

example, compared to 2012, with a total of six cyber-attacks, in 2016, more than two hundred hacks and attacks were reported on portals, government agencies, and personal accounts in Montenegro.[566]

On election day, October 16, cyber-attacks were carried out against the pro-government portals, such as the news site Cafe del Montenegro and "Antena M" radio's website, and as well as on the site of the Socialist Democratic Party, led by then-prime minister Djukanovic.[567] These were DDoS attacks, which aimed to make web servers and services inaccessible to users.[568] Reportedly the public was informed about the cyber-attacks, and Montenegrin national cyber security entities were taking all the measures to deal with these cyber-attacks.[569] Thus Montenegrin web portals reported stable functioning during the election time.[570]

On October 17, one day after the elections, Montenegro's Ministry for Information Society and Telecommunications announced that the website of the non-government organization Centre for Democratic Transition, which monitored the elections, and its subdomains had been under cyber-attacks for five days, making it unreachable at times.[571]

Extensive cyber disruptions hit social media messaging applications, such as Viber and WhatsApp, which aimed to spread false information about electoral fraud and, therefore, intensify mass public protests against the ruling prime minister's party.[572] The

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[566] Dusica Tomovic, "Montenegro on Alert over Rise in Cyber Attacks," *Balkan Insight*, last modified January 10, 2017, https://balkaninsight.com/2017/01/10/montenegro-on-alert-over-cyber-attacks-01-09-2017/.

[567] Georgi Gotev, "Montenegro Hit by Cyber-Attacks on Election Day," EurActiv, last modified October 17, 2016, https://www.euractiv.com/section/global-europe/news/montenegro-hit-by-cyber-attacks-on-election-day/; Tomovic, "Montenegro on Alert Over Rise in Cyber Attacks."

[568] Gotev, "Montenegro Hit by Cyber-Attacks on Election Day."

[569] Gotev.

[570] Gotev.

[571] Gotev; Tomovic.

[572] Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 16; Tomovic and Zivanovic, "Russia's Fancy Bear Hacks its Way into Montenegro"; Filip Stojanovski, "WhatsApp and Viber Blocked on Election Day in Montenegro," Global Voices, last modified October 17, 2016, https://advox.globalvoices.org/2016/10/17/whatsapp-and-viber-blocked-on-election-day-in-montenegro/.

Montenegrin government appealed to the higher court and was allowed to temporarily block these applications for two hours on the evening of referendum day.[573]

Following the planned coup, in February and June 2017, a GRU-affiliated hacker group, APT28, also known as Fancy Bear, attacked Montenegrin government agencies.[574] Montenegrin journalists Dusica Tomovic and Maja Zivanovic refer to Christopher Bing, associate editor of the U.S. cybersecurity website CyberScoop, explaining that, "APT28 is known to target military, governmental and civil society groups that are commonly of interest to the Russian state."[575] It is assumed that the APT28 may have been behind the October 2016 attacks on Montenegro's targets, as similar attacks with the same footprint as APT28 were carried out on the day of the referendum.[576]

According to the Montenegrin cyber security authorities, the Montenegrin ministry of defense allegedly fell victim to cyber-attacks some time before the election day. The coup was planned by GRU officers and the attack on the ministry of defense was likely to have been motivated by military interests; therefore, it was a GRU operation as a whole, and it seems plausible the attacks during the referendum were also carried out by the Fancy Bear group, the GRU affiliate.[577] It seems that the purpose of the cyber-attacks in the coup was to support the coup plotters by suppressing the public's access to information from government and pro-government portals in the actual coverage of events, creating confusion, and manipulating the public by disseminating fake news to incite more people to protest against the government.

The cyber-attacks were the only activities that actually took place in the planned coup attempt. Despite the fact that the remaining planned activities were stopped due to the would-be implementers' arrest, the attacks that did occur suggest that the cyber-

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[573] Tomovic and Zivanovic; Stojanovski.

[574] Tomovic and Zivanovic.

[575] Tomovic and Zivanovic, "Russia's Fancy Bear Hacks its Way into Montenegro."

[576] Christopher Bing, "APT28 Targeted Montenegro's Government Before It Joined NATO, Researchers Say," CyberScoop, last modified June 6, 2017, https://www.cyberscoop.com/apt28-targeted-montenegros-government-joined-nato-researchers-say/.

[577] Gotev, "Montenegro Hit by Cyber-attacks on Election Day."

attackers were not in Montenegro and were not in direct contact with the coup planners. The absence of coordination suggests that the GRU lacked central command and control in the Montenegrin coup attempt. It seems that the GRU had an initial plan for a coup d'état, the role and tasks of non-state actors in that plan, and the desired end goal. However, the elements implementing the plan, cyber-attackers and armed actors, pursued an overall aim independently during the once-initiated activities and did not coordinate their actions operationally. This, in turn, highlights that once the GRU launched the seemingly combined series of indirect means to overthrow the Montenegrin government, it actually had no control over the non-state actors it exploited.

4. Russian State Actors

Russia has extensively used individuals associated with Russian government agencies. This section details the activities of these individuals in Montenegro.

a. Eduard Shishmakov

One of the leading planners of the coup attempt was an experienced GRU officer, Eduard Shishmakov. Shishmakov used the alias Eduard Shirokov as a cover identity, and the Russian Federation had also issued him an authentic passport with that name.[578]

Interestingly, the GRU used Shishmakov to plan and prepare for the coup in Montenegro, which also required going to and staying in the area of operations. Shishmakov had previously, in 2013, served as a deputy naval military attaché at the Russian embassy in Warsaw, Poland. In 2014, Poland declared him persona non-grata due to a spy scandal and expelled him from the country.[579] Under diplomatic cover, Shishmakov recruited a Polish defense forces officer, a lieutenant colonel serving in the ministry of defense, who provided military information, and a Polish-Russian lawyer, who

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[578] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

[579] Dusica Tomovic and Natalia Zaba, "Montenegro Coup Suspect "Was Russian Spy in Poland,"" *Balkan Insight*, February 21, 2017, https://balkaninsight.com/2017/02/21/montenegro-coup-suspect-was-russian-spy-in-poland-02-21-2017/; Grozev.

passed financial information to the GRU.[580] The use of a fairly recently disclosed intelligence officer in such a sensitive operation raises questions. This shows either Shishmakov's very high qualifications or, conversely, the GRU's sloppy preparation for the operation. The use of Shishmakov is also likely to show the arrogance of the GRU, and the agency was likely confident that the operational environment would make it simple to conduct the operation successfully.

b.   Vladimir Moiseev

The other leading planner of the coup was GRU lieutenant colonel or colonel Vladimir Moiseev.[581] From 2009, Moiseev used the cover identity of Vladimir Popov.[582] He had previously served in the elite airborne forces, 45th Spetsnaz unit.[583] Between 2005 and 2009, Moiseev was assigned to the Spetsnaz unit no. 48427, which played an essential role in the 2008 Russian-Georgian war.[584] If Moiseev was assigned to this unit before 2008, he probably took part in the Russian-Georgian war.

From 2009, Moiseev worked under his cover identity as Popov for the insurance periodical *Morskoye Strakhovanie* (Marine Insurance).[585] He actively traveled in Europe in 2012–2016 as a photographer and journalist.[586] Moiseev used this cover identity in 2014 in Moldova when he participated in the GRU's attempt to thwart the signing of the

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580 "Работник российского посольства выдворен из Польши" [Russian Embassy Employee Expelled from Poland], Polskie Radio dla Zagranicy [Polish Radio for Abroad], November 13, 2014, http://archiwum.radiopolsha.pl/6/136/Artykul/187148; "Były Prawnik Został Oskarżony o Szpiegostwo na Rzecz Rosji. Stanisław Sz. Interesował Się Polską Energetyką" [Former Lawyer Was Accused of Espionage for Russia. Stanisław Sz. Was Interested in the Polish Energy Sector], *wPolityce*, May 4, 2016, https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/291650-byly-prawnik-zostal-oskarzony-o-szpiegostwo-na-rzecz-rosji-stanislaw-sz-interesowal-sie-polska-energetyka; Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

581 Rakuszitzky, "Second GRU Officer Indicted in Montenegro Coup Unmasked."

582 Rakuszitzky.

583 Rakuszitzky; Andrey Zhukov, "VDV na 2007, Utochnenie sostava" [Airborne Forces for 2007, Clarification of the Composition], Десантура - О десанте без границ (Forum) [Landing – About Landing without Borders], May 7, 2007, https://desantura.ru/forum/forum13/topic5882/.

584 Rakuszitzky.

585 Rakuszitzky.

586 Rakuszitzky.

Moldova–EU association agreement in 2015, when the GRU team attempted to poison a Bulgarian arms dealer, and in the Montenegrin coup operation in 2016.[587]

In the Moldovan case, Moiseev alias Popov, along with other GRU officers, prepared paramilitary units in southern Moldova to conduct similar operations to those in eastern Ukraine.[588] The Moldovan paramilitary proxy and auxiliary groups were trained and prepared at the GRU military base near the town of Aksai, Rostov-on-Don, in the Russian Federation.[589] As in Montenegro, the Moldovan security authorities managed to thwart the GRU's activities, and Moldova's association agreement with the EU was signed on June 27, 2014.[590]

Moiseev was also a member of the GRU team that poisoned Bulgarian arms dealer Emilian Gebrev in Bulgaria in 2015.[591] The GRU squad consisted of four operators, and Moiseev was the supporting member for the other three who poisoned Gebrev twice.[592] Both attempts were unsuccessful, and Gebrev survived the attacks.[593] From 2014 to 2015, Moiseev visited Bulgaria at least five times under his cover identity.[594]

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587 Vadim Vasiliu, "Diversioniștii Ruși Din Muntenegru Au Pregătit în 2014 Un Grup Subversiv în R. Moldova" [Russian Diversionists in Montenegro Prepared in 2014 a Subversive Group in the Republic of Moldova], *Deschide*, February 7, 2017, https://deschide.md/ro/stiri/politic/7166/Exclusiv-- Diversioni%C5%9Ftii-ru%C5%9Fi-din-Muntenegru-au-preg%C4%83tit-%C3%AEn-2014-un-grup- subversiv-%C3%AEn-R-Moldova.htm; Bellingcat Investigation Team; Bellingcat Investigation Team, "The Dreadful Eight: GRU's Unit 29155 and the 2015 Poisoning of Emilian Gebrev," Bellingcat, November 23, 2019, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2019/11/23/the-dreadful-eight-grus- unit-29155-and-the-2015-poisoning-of-emilian-gebrev/.

588 Vasiliu, "Russian Diversionists in Montenegro Prepared in 2014 a Subversive Group in the Republic of Moldova."

589 Vasiliu, "Russian Diversionists in Montenegro Prepared in 2014 a Subversive Group in the Republic of Moldova."

590 Vasiliu.

591 Bellingcat Investigation Team, "The Dreadful Eight."

592 Bellingcat Investigation Team.

593 Bellingcat Investigation Team.

594 Bellingcat Investigation Team.

c.	***GRU Covert Operations Unit 29155***

Shishmakov and Moiseev are members of a top-secret covert GRU unit, 29155.[595] This unit includes about twenty seasoned GRU officers with combat experience in conflicts such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, and Ukraine, and their skills and tradecraft range from signal intelligence to medicine.[596] This unit aims to destabilize Europe and the West's unity through subversion, sabotage, and assassinations, and to covertly increase the Kremlin's influence and fulfill its foreign policy goals.[597] Unit 29155 was probably set up after 2008, but its existence and activities were unknown to Western intelligence services until recently.[598]

The existence of GRU unit 29155 and the activities of its covert members began to become apparent to Western intelligence services following successive events in Europe that appeared to have been carried out by a similar handwriting and related members.[599] Members of the unit participated in the 2014 Crimean destabilization campaign, and its subsequent annexation; the 2014 destabilization attempt in Moldova; the 2015 poisoning of Gebrev in Bulgaria; the 2016 failed coup attempt in Montenegro; and the 2018 failed assassination of former GRU officer Sergei Skripal and his daughter Yulia in Salisbury, United Kingdom.[600] In 2019, the Spanish high court opened proceedings to investigate whether the unit and its members were involved in attempts to destabilize and influence

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[595] Bellingcat Investigation Team.

[596] Michael Schwirtz, "Top Secret Russian Unit Seeks to Destabilize Europe, Security Officials Say," *New York Times*, November 16, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/08/world/europe/unit-29155-russia-gru.html; Bellingcat Investigation Team, "The Dreadful Eight."

[597] Schwirtz, "Top Secret Russian Unit Seeks to Destabilize Europe, Security Officials Say."

[598] Schwirtz; Mitch Prothero, "A Secret Russian Assassination Squad Has Proved "They Can Get to Anyone" in Europe, But There's One Problem. They Are Really Sloppy," Business Insider, last modified October 9, 2019, https://www.businessinsider.com/gru-unit-29155-proves-they-can-get-to-anyone-but-theyre-really-sloppy-about-it-2019-10.

[599] Bellingcat Investigation Team, "The Dreadful Eight"; Schwirtz, "Top Secret Russian Unit Seeks to Destabilize Europe, Security Officials Say."

[600] Bellingcat Investigation Team; Schwirtz.

the 2017 Catalan independence referendum.[601] The most recent example of unit 29155's activities, published by the *New York Times* in 2020, involves bounties on American and coalition soldiers in Afghanistan, offered and paid to Taliban militants by the unit members.[602] These rewards to the Taliban for killing U.S. troops in Afghanistan represent a notable increase in the Russian Federation's efforts to challenge U.S. foreign policy interests directly.

5. Violent Auxiliary, Affiliate, and Criminal Proxy Actors in the Planned Coup

Shishmakov and Moiseev recruited Aleksandar Sindjelic, Russia's auxiliary leader in Serbia, to become the coup's primary organizer. Sindjelic received 200,000 euros (245,000 U.S. dollars) in financial assistance, technical means such as encrypted cell phones to be distributed among coup leaders, intelligence (a detailed blueprint of the parliament building and its territory), and an outlined execution plan from GRU officers to organize the coup.[603] He agreed to cooperate with the GRU for ideological reasons, as he had been a committed activist in anti-Western politics for many years.[604]

Sindjelic's pro-Kremlinism is reflected in his participation in the occupation of Crimea in 2014, where he manned the roadside checkpoints as a Serbian volunteer, and then fighting alongside the separatists in Donbas, eastern Ukraine, in 2015.[605] Sindjelic's participation in the events in Ukraine is significant for two reasons. First, there he caught

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[601] Oscar Lopez-Fonseca, Lucia Abellan, and Maria R. Sahuquillo, "Western Intelligence Services Tracked Russian Spy in Catalonia," *El Pais*, November 22, 2019, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/11/22/inenglish/1574408509_081088.html; Oscar Lopez-Fonseca and Fernando J. Perez, "Spain's High Court Opens Investigation into Russian Spying Unit in Catalonia," *El Pais*, November 21, 2019, https://english.elpais.com/elpais/2019/11/21/inenglish/1574324886_989244.html.

[602] Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt, and Michael Schwirtz, "Russia Secretly Offered Afghan Militants Bounties to Kill U.S. Troops, Intelligence Says," *New York Times*, July 29, 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/26/us/politics/russia-afghanistan-bounties.html; Amy Mackinnon, "What's This Unit of Russian Spies That Keeps Getting Outed?" *Foreign Policy*, July 1, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/01/what-is-unit-29155-gru-russian-spies-bounties/.

[603] Dusica Tomovic, "Montenegro Opposition Slams Coup Plotter's 'Witness' Status in Court," *Balkan Insight*, November 25, 2016, https://balkaninsight.com/2016/11/25/blame-game-continues-as-montenegro-offers-witness-status-to-coup-plotter-11-24-2016/; Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2."

[604] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2"; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 9.

[605] Grozev.

the eye of the GRU and also met his later recruiters, Shishmakov and Moiseev.[606] Second, participation in the Ukraine's events probably led to Sindjelic becoming one of the Russian auxiliary leaders in Serbia, which in turn contributed to his recruitment by the GRU to carry out the coup.

Sindjelic became a co-founder of the organization Serb Wolves, the Serbian branch of the Russian Night Wolves Motorcycle Club (NWMC).[607] As described in Chapter II, NWMC is the Russian-based criminal non-state entity that has become the state's proxy tool uniting battle-ready diasporas abroad. Sindjelic's cooperation with the NWMC most likely started in Ukraine when the NWMC supported operations in Crimea by organizing roadblocks, threatening Crimean officials, and assisting the Russian forces in raiding a Ukrainian naval base.[608] Sindjelic participated in at least one of these activities, manning checkpoints at the roadblocks in Crimea in 2014. Montenegrin journalist Tomovic refers to a Ukrainian source, which claims that Sindjelic chose Serbian "volunteers" as members of the Serb Wolves, the NWMC branch in Serbia, who also had experience with Russia's activities in Ukraine.[609] The Serb Wolves led by Sindjelic became a local Russian auxiliary group to influence the Balkans' events in Russia's favor. Members of both the Serb Wolves and the NWMC were to take part in the planned coup in Montenegro.[610]

The Serb Wolves is an auxiliary group because their pro-Kremlin mindset and the primary motivation for anti-Western action seem to be mostly ideological. Their leader, Sindjelic, received money from the GRU, but it was not used to motivate members but to prepare for a coup in Montenegro, such as acquiring weapons from Kosovo.[611] The Serb Wolves is a group inspired by Serbian extremist nationalism, amplified by Russian-

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[606] Vasiliu, "Russian Diversionists in Montenegro Prepared in 2014 a Subversive Group in the Republic of Moldova."

[607] Ely, "Balkans Should Beware of Putin's Night-Time Bikers"; Michael Carpenter, "Russia Is Co-Opting Angry Young Men – Fight Clubs, Neo-Nazi Soccer Hooligans, and Motorcycle Gangs Serve as Conduits for the Kremlin's Influence Operations in Western Countries," *Atlantic*, August 29, 2018, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/08/russia-is-co-opting-angry-young-men/568741/.

[608] Ely.

[609] Tomovic, "Montenegro Opposition Slams Coup Plotter's 'Witness' Status in Court."

[610] Ely, "Balkans Should Beware of Putin's Night-Time Bikers"; Vasiliu.

[611] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 11–12.

emphasized pan-Slavic ideology. Russian tactics to stress Serbian nationalism through pan-Slavism is purposeful because "extreme Serb nationalism, coupled with its vision of Greater Serbia (the unification of all ethnic Serbs into one state), creates fertile grounds for recruitment to Russian-backed political and paramilitary activities."[612]

Sindjelic was also a member of another, Montenegrin-based, paramilitary group Balkan Cossacks Army (BCA), affiliated with the NWMC.[613] BCA is a pro-Kremlin organization that brings together veteran-volunteers from recent Russian wars and conflicts, such as eastern Ukraine, and its mission is to reject the imposition of foreign values in the Balkans and promote pan-Slavism.[614] The leader of this organization is a Russian citizen and a self-proclaimed Cossack General Viktor Zaplatin.[615] He is a Soviet army veteran of numerous armed conflicts, and Serbia's pro-Russian press describes him as "the official representative of the Union of Volunteers, which is directly associated with Vladimir Putin."[616] He coordinates the activities of so-called Russian volunteers in the Balkans under the direct supervision of Aleksandr Boroday, a Russian citizen who was part of the planning circle for the occupation of Crimea and incited the separatist conflict in eastern Ukraine.[617] Boroday's activities in Ukraine were funded, supported, and directed by Konstantin Malofeev, the same Russian oligarch who was probably one of the authors of the idea of a coup in Montenegro.

The Cossack community and pro-Kremlin volunteer groups, often attached to the Cossacks, are the Russian affiliate forces that Russia uses abroad in PMC-like roles.[618] Domestically, in Russia, Cossacks are used as an auxiliary element. In 2005, President Putin signed the law "On the State Service of the Russian Cossacks," and since then, the

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[612] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 6.

[613] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 12.

[614] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2,"; Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 15.

[615] Jasna Vukicevic and Robert Coalson, "Russia's Friends Form New 'Cossack Army' in Balkans," Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, October 18, 2016, https://www.rferl.org/a/balkans-russias-friends-form-new-cossack-army/28061110.html.

[616] Vukicevic and Coalson, "Russia's Friends Form New 'Cossack Army' in Balkans."

[617] Vukicevic and Coalson.

[618] Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, *Russian Private Military Companies*, 8.

prominent part of the Cossacks has been the patriotic and Orthodox tutoring of young people in Russia.[619] Moreover, the Russian Cossack community regard themselves as the "carrier of conservative Orthodox values, fighting with the degenerate West and Islamic fundamentalism," and their role as an internal security auxiliary force has expanded.[620] Except for the struggle in eastern Ukraine, where they have been involved in armed activities, the Cossacks are largely used for soft-power influencing outside Russia.[621]

The ceremonial founding of the BCA in the Montenegrin town of Kotor, which took place a few months before the coup attempt, was led by Serbian Orthodox priest Momchilo Krivokapic and several members of the NWMC.[622] The activities of the Serbian Orthodox Church and the NWMC in supporting pro-Kremlin auxiliary and proxy groups are often mutually supportive and complementary.[623] Russian Cossacks fighting alongside the separatists in eastern Ukraine also attended the Kotor ceremony and conveyed Boroday's greetings.[624]

The direct role of the BCA as an organization in the planned coup is unknown or unclear.[625] As the coup was going to involve nearly five hundred participants, it is possible that some BCA members were recruited or planned to attend the event. Yet, since the BCA was established a few months before Montenegro's elections, it is possible that BCA's intended role may have been to participate in the post-coup events and to help to stabilize Montenegro and lend support in turning the political environment in directions favorable to Russia.

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[619] Jolanta Darczewska, *Putin's Cossacks: Just Folklore - or Business and Politics?*, OSW Point of View 68 (Warsaw, Poland: Centre for Eastern Studies, 2017), 5, 22–23, http://aei.pitt.edu/92792/1/pw_68_putin_cossacks_net.pdf; Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 9

[620] Darczewska, *Putin's Cossacks: Just Folklore - or Business and Politics?*, 61; Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 9.

[621] Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory, 9.

[622] Vukicevic and Coalson; "ИН4С: У Котору формирана Балканска козачка војска" [IN4S: Balkan Cossack Army Formed in Kotor], September 11, 2016, in4snet, video, 9:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BVKoUrWLN8.

[623] Ely, "Balkans Should Beware of Putin's Night-Time Bikers."

[624] Vukicevic and Coalson, "Russia's Friends Form New 'Cossack Army' in Balkans."

[625] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2"; Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 10.

Sindjelic hired another member of the BCA, former Serbian special police chief Bratislav Dikic, to lead and organize the Montenegrin coup's armed activities.[626] Dikic's job was to lead agents disguised as police officers to infiltrate the parliament building, shoot the protesters, assassinate the Montenegrin prime minister, and keep the building under control for forty-eight hours.[627] Dikic can be considered a proxy actor because his primary motivation to join in the plot was money. He received 15,000 euros (18,400 U.S. dollars) from the GRU through Sindjelic to participate in the coup.[628]

On the night of October 15, while arrests of the coup plotters were underway, the Montenegrin security agency reportedly received information from Serbia's Security Intelligence Agency that fifty GRU Spetsnaz operators had entered Montenegro's mountainous Zlatibor region from Serbia.[629] Their first task was to destroy a nearby Montenegrin special forces compound to prevent the unit from intervening in the events in the capital, Podgorica.[630] The Spetsnaz unit then had to move to Podgorica to support Dikic's operations in possible post-election confrontations.[631] Through encrypted phones, this Spetsnaz unit had allegedly been waiting for confirming information from the opposition politician and coup plotter Knežević to start the mission but was forced to abort the operation since Knežević never contacted them.[632] Montenegrin authorities believe that the GRU specialized group exited Montenegro via neighboring countries.[633]

The key person leading to the failure of the coup attempt was Montenegrin national Mirko Velimirovic. After being recruited, Sindjelic received money and instructions from

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[626] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 12.

[627] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 12; Grozev.

[628] Tomovic, "Montenegro Opposition Slams Coup Plotter's 'Witness' Status in Court"; Grozev.

[629] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 10.

[630] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, *Hanging by a Thread*, 10; "Why the Coup Failed: DF Incompetent, Velimirovic Ratted Out the Plan," *Café del Montenegro*, March 27, 2017, https://www.cdm.me/english/coup-failed-df-incompetent-velimirovic-ratted-plan/.

[631] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer, 10.

[632] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer.

[633] Bajrovic, Garčević, and Kraemer.

GRU officers in Moscow to prepare for and carry out the coup.[634] Returning from Moscow, Sindjelic contacted and recruited Velimirovic, whose tasks were to obtain weaponry from Kosovo, recruit additional people to participate in the coup, and rent a house in the Montenegrin capital, Podgorica, to be used for storage and as a safe house.[635] It is unclear whether Velimirovic was initially a Montenegrin police collaborator or whether he broke under pressure in the run-up to the coup and became a police informant. Through Velimirovic, the main organizers and leaders of the coup's armed activity, Sindjelic and Dikic, were captured and arrested, which prevented the plot from materializing.[636]

E.   CONCLUSION

As noted previously, Russia considers the Balkan region to be its sphere of influence. To consolidate and increase its influence in the region, Russia relies mainly on pan-Slavism and Orthodox Christianity. It emphasizes the unity, historical ties, and values of the Slavic peoples and the need to unite Slavs regardless of state borders and geographical location. Through ethnic proximity and religious values, Russia presents itself as a region's guardian against the so-called hostile and malign West's influence. Hence, Russia saw Montenegro's accession to NATO as a serious threat to maintaining its power in the region. Also, despite the initial setback, Russia hoped to gain friendly access to the Mediterranean through Montenegro, which became impossible with Montenegro's accession to NATO.

The leading planners of the 2016 Montenegrin coup were two GRU officers, Eduard Shishmakov and Vladimir Moiseev, who belonged to the GRU's top-secret covert unit 29155. Members of this unit have been involved or suspected of participating in several covert operations in Europe since 2014, such as the assassination attempt of former GRU officer Sergey Skripal and his daughter in Salisbury, UK. Interestingly, despite the

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[634] Grozev, "Balkan Gambit: Part 2"; RTV B92, "Djukanovic was the target of two Russians, they were in Serbia.."

[635] Grozev.

[636] Grozev.

unit's likely high level of professionalism and experienced members, its known operations in Europe have all failed.[637] For the coup in Montenegro, Shishmakov and Moiseev recruited Serbian criminal and nationalist Aleksandar Sindjelic, who had previously taken part as a Serbian volunteer in the annexation of Crimea and hostilities in eastern Ukraine. Although Sindjelic became the main organizer, responsible for arranging the rest of the local participants' recruitment and preparations for the coup, the plan and funding came through the Shishmakov and Moiseev from the GRU.

The coup plan called for the recruitment of up to 500 participants, most of whom were primarily members of local pro-Kremlin auxiliary and proxy organizations and had experience in fighting in Ukraine. On election day, October 16, 2016, when the Montenegrin government voted about joining NATO, the plotters planned an anti-government demonstration in front of the parliament building. The plan was to escalate the demonstration into violent protest and, under its cover, invade the parliament building, assassinate then-prime minister Milo Djukanovic, and transfer power to Montenegro's pro-Kremlin political opposition. The opposition, the Democratic Front, would have changed Montenegro's foreign policy course and suspended its accession to NATO.

The coup failed because one of the key organizers, Montenegrin Mirko Velimirovic, became an informant for the Montenegrin police, and other essential organizers and perpetrators were arrested through him before the coup attempt. The leading planners and sponsors of the coup, GRU officers Shishmakov and Moiseev, managed to avoid the arrest and escape through neighboring Serbia.

The GRU's planned coup in Montenegro failed because there was one weak link in the plan and preparations, which was Velimirovic. Therefore, the whole Russian NTW campaign in Montenegro was a failure, and Montenegro joined NATO in 2017. The author does not know whether Velimirovic became a police informant during the coup's preparations or whether he was a police collaborator from the beginning and the coup was

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[637] Prothero, "A Secret Russian Assassination Squad Has Proved "They Can Get to Anyone" in Europe, But There's One Problem. They Are Really Sloppy."

compromised from the start. Had the Montenegrin police not been aware of the coup plan through Velimirovic in time, however, the coup could have succeeded.

It seems to the author that sufficient preparations had been made for a possible successful coup because the activities among the various armed auxiliary, affiliate, and proxy groups to conduct the operations and stabilize the post-coup situation were coordinated.

The Montenegrin coup was also to be supported by cyber-attacks, probably carried out by the GRU affiliated APT28. The cyber-attacks were likely intended to cause additional confusion, encourage more people to participate in the protests, exhaust Montenegro's resilience, and thus, support the coup. It seems to the author that there was a lack of cooperation and coordination between cyber-attackers and violent groups responsible for attacking the parliament house. The lack of collaboration is indicated by the fact that, despite the arrest of coup plotters and the failure of the coup attempt, cyber-attacks nevertheless took place. This, in turn, suggests that the GRU had no control over the various elements intended to carry out the coup as a whole.

Based on Montenegro's example, the author concludes that once the GRU has a plan and a goal in place, the various non-state actors follow the general objective, and they are autonomous in their activities.

V.   CONCLUSION

The thesis examined two in-depth case studies to map Russia's use of non-state actors to achieve its foreign policy goals in its "near abroad" and in a region that Russia considers its sphere of influence, and to assess Russia's success in using these non-state actors. More precisely, the research examined the central proposition of the thesis that Russia's activities using non-state actors are more efficient and effective in an environment close to Russia geographically, with historical ties and cultural similarities and convenient preconditions for action. The research examined this proposition in terms of one case of geographical proximity (Estonia) and one case of cultural and religious proximity (Montenegro) to Russia. In both cases, the research revealed that, contrary to the proposition that assumed success, Russia's strategy of using non-state actors to achieve its foreign policy goals failed. This outcome partially refutes the central proposal. Nonetheless, in both cases, Russia managed to provoke or instigate internal conflicts in the target countries through the use of influencing campaigns and non-state actors precisely for reasons suggested by the proposition—historical ties, cultural similarities, and convenient preconditions for action.

The reasons for the failure of Russia's strategies in Estonia and Montenegro were different, and they were instead caused by insufficient or failed preparations and planning. In the first case, it seems that Russia focused mainly on creating a conflict in Estonia, but there was no follow-up plan on how to proceed after its start. Therefore, it can be said that Russia used the favorable opportunity to test its ability to use non-state actors against the state in NATO and the EU. In addition, as Chapter II describes Russia's goals to use every possibility to weaken the West, there was a potential opportunity for Moscow to exhaust its opponent in Russia's "near abroad" and also fragment European unity. In the case of Montenegro, Russia managed to pave the way for a successful NTW campaign under the conditions set out in the central proposal of the thesis. Unlike the case in Estonia, there was also a follow-up plan to achieve the goal with non-state actors and prevent Montenegro from joining NATO or at least postponing the process. The failure was caused by a weak

link in the plan, without which it is possible that the coup attempt in Montenegro could have succeeded.

A. THE PATTERN OF RUSSIA'S NTW CAMPAIGNS AND THE USE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

As this thesis has shown, the prerequisite for starting a Russian NTW campaign is the psychological influencing of the target country's population and government to create, maintain, and amplify divisions in the target state's society.

1. Creating the Preconditions for an NTW Campaign

One essential channel of influence in the Russian NTW to divide and manipulate the target country's society is the media. The Russian media is mainly state-controlled, and it played an essential role in both case studies. In Estonia's case, the vast majority of Estonian Russians consume either Russian media channels directly or media created and directed from Russia to the Baltic Russians. A similar situation exists in the Balkans, where many Montenegro and Serbia media outlets and websites are taking information directly from Russian media sources.[638]

Based on both case studies, it can be seen that the three main goals that the Russian media and local Russian-linked media channels are trying to achieve with propaganda and information manipulation in the target country are:

- To obstruct the integration of the target country's society. To this end, the Russian-linked media attempts to contrast, differentiate, and create contradictions among the various nationalities living in the target country. In Estonia's case, the biased media portrays Estonian Russians as being subjected to ethnic inequality, harassment, and humiliation. In the case of Montenegro, the directional media emphasizes pan-Slavism, Slavic pride and independence, and Slavic opposition to the demoralized West. This

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[638] Stronski and Himes, *Russia's Game in the Balkans*, 8.

strategy creates a situation where anyone who is not Slavic or does not support pan-Slavism can be portrayed as an opponent.

- To display the target as a weak and law-breaking state, hostile to Russia. In Estonia's case, the Russian media promotes the view that after the collapse of the Soviet Union and accession to the West, Estonia has become a poor, demoralized, and declining country. In Montenegro's case, through the Russian media, Montenegro is portrayed as a traitor that has turned its back on traditional values and has become a Western puppet.

- To ridicule Western culture and values and portray Western influence as hostile and aggressive. This is evident in the negative portrayal of NATO, the EU, and other Western organizations by Russian media or media outlet linked to Russia. For example, such a narrative maintains that NATO only causes trouble with its provocative behavior, and in reality, the ordinary people of the target country suffer. Further, the narrative argues that the target state's government is to blame, and the people should not trust their government because of the state's membership in NATO and other Western organizations.

Although the Bronze Soldier case took place in 2007 and the Montenegrin coup attempt almost ten years later in 2016, the Russian influencing strategy's build-up was similar in both instances. In addition to broader media activities, the Russian leadership directed a dedicated central body under the direct control of the government to coordinate and control the influencing of the target state's population and government locally.

2. A Central Body with a Direct Link to the Russian Leadership

In both studies, a state-controlled central body emerged, which could operate, for example, under the cover of a cultural or strategic research center. The central body's tasks, subordinated to or directly linked to Kremlin, are to coordinate, support and, if necessary, direct the activities of influence agents and influence organizations operating in the target

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country or region. This central body can cooperate with Russian intelligence and security agencies in recruiting and directing influence agents to fulfill its role.

In Estonia's case, this central body is the DIRCCFC (Directorate for Interregional Relations and Cultural Contacts with Foreign Countries), which reports directly to the president's administration. In the case of Montenegro, the central body is Serbian-based RISS (Russian Institute for Strategic Studies), directly controlled by the Kremlin. The SVR generals head both organizations.

Despite these similarities, the case studies revealed a difference in the location of the body that manages and coordinates influencing activities. In Estonia's case, since the DIRCCFC covers former Soviet member states in Russia's vicinity or its "near abroad," the central body is located in the Russian Federation. In the case of geographically remote regions that Russia considers to be in its sphere of influence or wishes to control, this central body, according to Montenegro's case, is located in the region of interest.

3. Influence Organizations and Influence Agents Managed and Coordinated by the Central Body

In Estonia's case, the study revealed that the DIRCCFC manages and coordinates various NGOs' activities through covert direct links. NGOs, in turn, can be led by individuals associated with Russian special services or their former officers. The HMF (Historical Memory Foundation), brought as an example in the study, is headed by an individual related to the FSB.

NGOs present themselves as credible organizations that carry out seemingly serious research and base their analyses on scientific or academic foundations. By manipulating information, they aim to prove to the international community and the Russian target group, both in the target country and at home, that the target country violates not only human rights but the law and does not fit into the international community. To carry out their tasks, these NGOs work with various journalists, historians, academics, and politicians and, in turn, use smaller non-profit organizations.

Secondly, these central bodies direct and coordinate influence agents in the region and the target country (Estonia and the Baltics, and Montenegro and the Balkans). In the

example of Estonia, there were Russian journalists dedicated to influencing, specifically Zorina and Sapozhnikova. These journalists' main task seemed to be to spread anti-Estonian propaganda and fake news and sow distrust between Estonians and Estonian Russians. To this end, for the media created for the Russian-speaking population in Estonia and the Baltics, these Russian journalists produced torn-out-of-context or manipulated information, fake news and, if necessary, even staged events to convey the desired message. Also, both journalists coordinated their actions with pro-Kremlin auxiliary and proxy organizations. Zorina, who organized influencing activities against Estonia mainly from Russia, cooperated with the Russian-based youth organization Nashi, and Sapozhnikova, who was primarily active in Estonia, collaborated with the local Night Watch organization.

Based on a study on Montenegro, RISS coordinated and supported the main anti-NATO and anti-Western agents in the region. These agents included Amfilohije Radović, the archbishop of the influential Serbian Orthodox Church in the region, Andrija Mandić and Milan Knežević, leaders of the Montenegrin political opposition, and Konstantin Malofeev, a Russian oligarch in direct contact with RISS. Mandić, Knežević, and Radović, in turn, were divided into separate, political and religious influence agents, which the author describes in more detail in the next section of this chapter.

Influence agents may also have additional roles to play. In addition to influencing, agents can also act as so-called talent seekers looking for people in the target country or region who could be recruited as influence agents or whose recruitment or cooperation could otherwise benefit Russia in fulfilling its goals. In Estonia's example, journalist Sapozhnikova forwarded the DIRCCFC a list of "Promising Estonian People" that included Estonian politicians' and journalists' names. The Montenegrin case study showed that RISS director Reshetnikov and Malofeev suggested, probably to the GRU, the individuals in the Balkans, whom they recommended to recruit in carrying out the coup.

In Malofeev's example, the agent of influence may be a wealthy Russian businessman or an oligarch with seemingly personal business interests in the target country or region. The Russian oligarchs have gained their wealth thanks to the fact that the Russian leadership, led by President Putin, has made it possible for them. The price of this wealth

is to support and obey the leadership of the Russian state. In the target country, therefore, wealthy Russian civilians, seemingly not connected to the Russian state, stand for their business interests and beliefs, but they also clandestinely serve Russia's foreign policy goals. In Malofeev's example, he communicated with the Russian leadership through RISS and his role seemed to be to support, coordinate, and possibly fund local influence agents and other actors who supported Russia's aims.

4.   Political and Religious Influence Agents

Based on the case studies, it seems essential for Russia to create a political influence agent supporting Russian policies in the target country or region, who could, at least ostensibly, intervene in the local political landscape to confront and create confusion and contradictions. It also seems important for Russia to recruit an agent in an area that plays an essential and influential role in the target state's society and can emotionally affect the members of the community; such an area is religion. These influence agents are either run directly from Russia, which often leads to the agent traveling to Russia or meeting with Russian representatives in third countries, for example, at various conferences and events. While in the target state, the Russian embassy or intelligence agencies' staff coordinates the agents' activities.

In the case of Estonia, the leading political influence agent was Andrei Zarenkov. He created the facade organization Constitutional Party, funded and supported by the Russian embassy in Tallinn, various Moscow city government agencies, the Russian media, and contact persons in the Russian special services.[639] Zarenkov met with Russian representatives both in Russia and with embassy staff in Estonia.[640] Also, Dmitriy Linter and Dmitriy Klenskiy, who had a political background in Estonia, became leaders of the pro-Kremlin auxiliary organization the Night Watch.[641] The author describes the Night

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[639] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2006*, 11.

[640] Estonian Internal Security Service, 10–11.

[641] Estonian Internal Security Service, *Estonian Internal Security Service's Annual Review 2005*, 16; Raun, "The Night Watch Leaders Were Acquitted in Court Again."

Watch and the role of auxiliary organizations in NTW in more detail in this chapter's next section.

However, Linter and Klenskiy are further examples of how influence agents can play additional roles or how their role can be enhanced as events unfold. Of the two, Linter often traveled to Russia and met with embassy staff in Estonia.[642] Although Zarenkov did not participate directly in the Bronze Soldier riots, Zarenkov and Linter coordinated their activities before the Bronze Soldier events in Estonia.[643]

In Montenegro, the political agents were Mandić and Knežević, leaders of the Democratic Front of the Russian pro-Russian political opposition. These politicians had active and direct connections to President Putin's United Party of Russia, and they met several times and held talks with senior officials of that party.

Religion does not play a primary role in Estonian society and cultural space, and probably, therefore, there was no leading religious influence agent in Estonia. In Montenegro and Serbia, where the Serbian Orthodox Church is prominent and influential, the archbishop Radović was the spiritual influence agent. Radović tried to promote anti-Westernism and prevent Montenegro from joining NATO by emphasizing local religious values. Moreover, Radović had ties to the Russian Orthodox Church, which is closely linked to Russia's special services. In Montenegro, Radović cooperated and coordinated his actions with Mandić and Knežević, political agents, as well as Reshetnikov, director of RISS, and oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, Russia's local agent.

Therefore, the study shows that there was more room for influence and action for Slavophile Russian non-state organizations in Montenegro to have a role than in Estonia, where roughly 80 percent of the population is not Orthodox Christian.[644] Therefore, in environments where there is a considerable Slavic and Eastern Orthodox community,

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[642] Kagge, "The Shadow of Russian Diplomats Is behind the Actions of Extremists."

[643] Kagge.

[644] "Õigeusk Eestis: Milline on Olukord?" [Orthodoxy in Estonia: What Is the Situation?] Tallinna Nevski Katedraal [Tallinn Nevsky Cathedral], accessed February 27, 2021, http://tallinnanevskikatedraal.eu/oigeusk-eestis-milline-on-olukord/.

Russia has additional assets compared to countries where they do not exist, are in a significant minority, or have minimal influence.

The study also shows that all these influence agents in the Balkans had a direct link with Russia, but the so-called daily activities in the region were probably coordinated and mediated by RISS director Reshetnikov and Malofeev.

5.   Violent Non-State Actors

After preparing the ground through influencing activities, Russia's NTW strategy seems to focus on the existence of a local pro-Kremlin or at least anti-governmental group operating in the target country, and such a group should have overlapping goals with those of Russia. The purpose of a violent local group or groups is to directly oppose the government of the target state and participate in culminating events such as the Bronze Soldier street riots and the coup in Montenegro, which require some form of violent or armed action. The author assesses that the local violent groups are necessary to publicly portray the confrontation as a local problem and distance Russia's direct involvement in the conflict.

Based on the examples in Estonia and Montenegro, it seems that Russian entities are recruiting a key person locally who will have direct contact with the Russian authorities and whose task is to form that local violent organization that supports Russia's goals. Estonia's and Montenegro's cases also show that the local pro-Russian auxiliary or proxy organization will be supported by a similar organization from Russia.

The author assesses that the Estonian pro-Kremlin auxiliary group, the Night Watch, did not become a violent group that could directly threaten Estonia's security because the political influence agent Linter, who formed it, could not recruit or involve enough dedicated members. Nonetheless, the Night Watch contributed to provoking the Bronze Soldier riots. Thus, in Estonia's case, as a result, the Night Watch did not become a violent group, but, like their leader Linter, instead became an influence group.

As influencers, Linter and the Night Watch collaborated with a similar organization in Russia, the pro-Kremlin youth organization Nashi. Nashi's leader in Estonia, Mark

Siryk, collaborated in Estonia with Linter and helped organize the Night Watch's activities. Also, Nashi leaders in Russia wanted to support the Night Watch's activities in provoking the Bronze Soldier incident and also during street riots. As described earlier, Russian journalists Sapozhnikova and Zorina also coordinated their activities and collaborated with the Night Watch and Nashi.

The Montenegrin case study shows that the GRU recruited a Serb nationalist, Aleksandar Sindjelic, to organize the coup. Sindjelic formed the violent local pro-Kremlin organization the Serb Wolves after returning from hostilities in Ukraine, where he had come into contact with both the GRU and the Russian organized crime group NWMC. Therefore, the author assesses that it is probable that Sindjelic was, in fact, recruited by the GRU to carry out possible future NTW operations in the Balkans, not just before the Montenegrin coup, but already in Ukraine. Returning from Ukraine, he formed a branch of the NWMC in Serbia, to which he recruited local Balkans, mostly Serbs, who also had taken part in hostilities in Ukraine.

A Russian equivalent, the NWMC directly supported the activities of Sindjelic and the Serb Wolves in Montenegro and Serbia. In addition to backing the Serb Wolves, the NWMC assisted and participated in establishing another violent organization in Montenegro, the BCA (the Balkan Cossack Army). The creation of the BCA seems to have been Russia's preparations for the post-coup era in Montenegro. Thus, it seems that the BCA's main task was to become one of the actors to stabilize the post-coup environment and to shape it in line with Russia's goals.

The BCA is still led by two former Russian military personnel who were also involved as "volunteers" in conflicts such as in eastern Ukraine, in Transnistria in Moldova, and in Abkhazia in Georgia.[645] The organization has close links with its Russian Cossack counterparts.[646] At least before the coup attempt, BCA was also known to be associated with so-called Russian volunteers. This BCA concept seems to support a similar pattern to

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[645] Mladen Obrenovic, "Under Cossack Banner, Russian Ties with Balkan Fighters Strengthened," *Balkan Insight*, October 16, 2020, https://balkaninsight.com/2020/10/16/under-cossack-banner-russian-ties-with-balkan-fighters-strengthened/.

[646] Obrenovic, "Under Cossack Banner, Russian Ties with Balkan Fighters Strengthened."

the events in Ukraine after 2014. If the coup in Montenegro had been successful, the alleged protection and preservation of the Slavs' rights would probably have become even more of a priority. Consequently, a "guarding and protective" organization, such as the BCA, led by former Russian military personnel and composed of Russian volunteers and "brothers in arms" to support the fraternal peoples, other Slavs in defending their rights and values, would have been pertinent.

Thus, the author estimates that the Serb Wolves, the NWMC, and the BCA formed a system of violent auxiliary and proxy organizations in Montenegro. Armed groups, probably composed mainly of the Serb Wolves members, were tasked with carrying out the coup. In the ensuing period, Sindjelic and the Serb Wolves would have been joined by BCA. The preparations and activities of both organizations were supported, coordinated, and possibly controlled by the NWMC, which in turn is coordinated by the GRU.

The location of various influence agents and organizations and other non-state actors in the network of the NTW campaign build-up, their contacts with Russian authorities and entities, and their cooperation are illustrated in Figure 2.
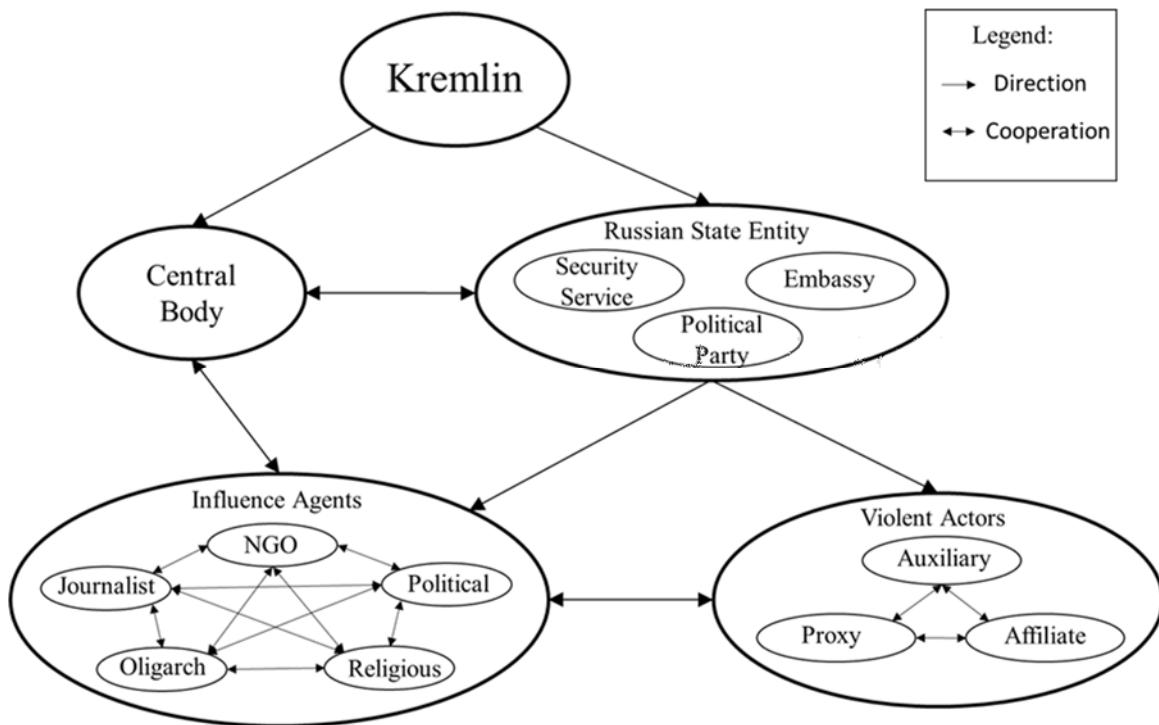
Figure 2. Location of influence agents and other non-state actors in the NTW
campaign, contacts with Russian authorities, and mutual cooperation.

6. Cyber Operations

Russia is the main security threat to Western democracies in cyberspace.[647] Much
of Russia's cyber activity is related to intelligence, which is increasingly complemented by
the use of cyberspace for influencing, and if combined, aims to "divide Western societies,
transnational relations, and NATO."[648]

Here are the four main methods that Russian special services are actively using
against Russian opponents:

- Hacking into a media outlet's website and adding news with pro-Kremlin
  narratives, from where this news link is distributed in other media, later
  also in Russian media, blogs, forums, and elsewhere. In 2020, this method

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[647] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *Eesti Rahvusvahelises Julgeolekukeskkonnas 2021*
[International Security and Estonia 2021] (Tallinn, Estonia: EFIS, 2021), 65,
https://www.valisluureamet.ee/pdf/raport/2021-EST.pdf.

[648] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2021*, 65.

was used several times in Lithuania and Poland to spread fake news about NATO and its forces.[649]

- Russia's special services disseminate stolen information from cyber-attacks that has been torn-out-of-context and could exacerbate disagreements on sensitive societal issues and help provoke protests. In 2019, Russia used this method against the United States and the UK on a trade negotiations topic.[650]

- Russian special services organize DoS attacks on the media and government sector, which, among other things, hinder the flow of official information. The aim is to show Russia as a threatening force, create confusion, sow fear, and force the target country to make decisions favorable to Russia. Russia used this method in Estonia in 2007 and Montenegro in 2016.[651]

- Russian special services break into a website and add photos, text, video, or audio with frightening, threatening, or socially disturbing content. The aim is to prevent the flow of truthful information, create fear in society, deepen internal tensions, or undermine government agencies' credibility. Russia used this method in 2019 in Georgia, when GRU hackers broke into the web service provider's information system, through which they defaced thousands of websites, adding a photo of former president in exile Mikhail Saakashvili with the text "I'm coming back."[652]

Thus, Russian cyber activity seems like a separate branch of the NTW, which constantly looks independently for opportunities and weaknesses to disrupt the entire West or governments deemed unfriendly to Russia. It seems that Russian special services see

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[649] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, *International Security and Estonia 2021*, 67.

[650] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 67.

[651] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 68.

[652] Estonian Foreign Intelligence Service, 68.

cyber-attacks as a tool to complement other NTW activities, but they are started and used as separate tools of NTW. The author assesses that, if Russia sees that as a result of general anti-Western subversion, there is an opportunity to use NTW to directly weaken some member state, such as Estonia, or the need to launch a targeted anti-state campaign, such as in Montenegro, the cyber sector, which is carrying out broader and comprehensive NTW activities against the West anyway, will be involved in supporting these campaigns.

Based on the examples of Estonia and Montenegro, the author assesses that the cyber-attacks seem to be a separate part of both NTW campaigns, which were implemented or planned to be implemented simultaneously with other NTW activities, such as street riots or an attack on the parliament building, but were not coordinated with other actions.

Cyber-attacks began almost simultaneously with the street riots in Estonia but continued in various waves for nearly three weeks after the street riots were suppressed. As this was the first time that combined cyber-attacks were used against a state, the aim likely was to test a so-called new method to find out how cyber-attacks can be used, what damage they cause, and what can be achieved in its entirety by cyber-attacks in this massive form. In Montenegro's case, the cyber-attacks were the only NTW activities that actually happened. This activity suggests a lack of communication and coordination, which, in turn, indicates that the cyber-attacks were an independent part of the NTW and that the GRU probably lacked control over the elements of the NTW. Still, as the cyber-attacks were probably intended as a supporting element to the canceled primary action, as separately conducted attacks, they did not have a significant impact on Montenegro's security.

B. THE CASES OF CATALONIA'S INDEPENDENCE REFERENDUM AND NORTH MACEDONIA'S PATH TO NATO

In support of the conclusions drawn from the case studies, the author presents in brief two additional examples of how Russia uses media, influence agents, and organizations as the basis of its NTW build-up. The first example is the Catalan independence referendum in Spain in 2017, when, like in Estonia in 2007, Russia interfered in the internal matters of a NATO and the EU member-state. The second example, which

focuses on North Macedonia, shows how Russia tried to obstruct another Balkan state like Montenegro from moving towards the West and joining NATO.

1. Catalan Independence Referendum in 2017

Catalonia's independence referendum in 2017, by which the Spanish autonomous region of Catalonia wanted to secede from the rest of Spain, is another example of how the Russian Federation took a favorable opportunity to amplify an internal conflict in a NATO and EU member-state. In doing so, Russia's main goal was probably to weaken and divide the West and its organizations.[653] The Spanish government declared the referendum illegal and suspended the region's attempt for independence.[654]

The Spanish Supreme Court accused Russia of an information war in which Russia, by spreading fake news and manipulating information, tried to create and amplify social divisions in Catalonia and thus encourage Catalans to participate in the independence referendum.[655] Based on the case studies analyzed in the thesis, the author concludes that the Russian NTW campaign's primary activity is to psychologically influence the target country's population to create divisions in the population and then amplify them. Successful influencing, after which the population of the target country is divided and conflicted, is the basis and creates the preconditions for the use of other elements of NTW, such as violent auxiliary and proxy non-state actors. Thus, Russia's NTW concept used in Spain was similar its approach in Estonia and Montenegro.

Russia's influencing strategy in support of the Catalan referendum was mainly divided into two—the use of the media and activities supporting it on social media. Russia's state-controlled media outlets, such as RT (Russia Today) and its sister service Sputnik, massively spread the news with manipulated content or outright fake news. For

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[653] Ellis Palmer, "Spain Catalonia: Did Russian "Fake News" Stir Things Up?" BBC News, last modified November 18, 2017, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41981539.

[654] Palmer, "Spain Catalonia: Did Russian "Fake News" Stir Things Up?"

[655] Palmer; Graham Keeley, "Russia Meddled in Catalonia Independence Referendum, Says German Intelligence Boss," *Sunday Times*, May 15, 2018, https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/russia-meddled-in-catalonia-vote-p6g5nttpm.

example, RT "[was] using its Spanish-language portal to spread stories on the Catalan crisis with a bias against constitutional legality."[656]

Also, it seems that Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks, acted as Russia's influence agent because he "[became] the principal international agitator in the Catalan crisis, sharing opinions and half-truths as if they were news."[657] In addition, "automated "bots," including Russian propaganda ones, amplified tweets by Assange and former United States National Security Agency (NSA) contractor-turned-leaker Edward Snowden,"[658] and "pro-Kremlin websites including Disobedient Media, News-Front, and Russia News Now spread fake or biased news about the situation in Catalonia."[659]

Members of the Spanish government accused unspecified Russian government agencies and private entities of massively disseminating and amplifying Catalan pro-separatist messages through fake social media accounts on platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, to influence public opinion.[660] The author estimates that these unspecified state agencies were Russian special services and private sector entities were Russian cybercriminals used by special services. The author's assessment is based on the *modus operandi* of Russian special services and cybercriminals described in Chapter II and the similarities of the cyber activities analyzed in the case studies. Also, nearly 30 percent of fake social media accounts originated in Venezuela.[661] This further refers to the involvement of Russian special services, as Russia is also closely involved in Venezuela and has, among other things, deployed GRU special and cyber units there.[662]

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[656] Ben Nimmo, "Election Watch: Russia and Referendums in Catalonia? Assessing Claims of Russian Propaganda in Spain," DRF Lab, last modified September 28, 2017, https://medium.com/dfrlab/electionwatch-russia-and-referendums-in-catalonia-192743efcd76.

[657] Nimmo, "Election Watch: Russia and Referendums in Catalonia? Assessing Claims of Russian Propaganda in Spain."

[658] Nimmo.

[659] Nimmo.

[660] Robin Emmott, "Spain Sees Russian Interference in Catalonia Separatist Vote," Reuters, November 13, 2017, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-spain-politics-catalonia-russia-idUSKBN1DD20Y.

[661] Emmott, "Spain Sees Russian Interference in Catalonia Separatist Vote."

[662] Matt Spetalnick, "Russian Deployment in Venezuela Includes "Cybersecurity Personnel": U.S. Official," Reuters, March 26, 2019, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-venezuela-politics-russians-idUSKCN1R72FX.

In addition to exploiting the news media and social media, Russia used powerful Catalan businessmen as agents of influence. Spanish police arrested several Catalan businessmen after the referendum failed, at least three of whom had contacts with Russia.[663] One of those arrested with Russian contacts was "a former member of the Catalan government and ex-member of the dissolved terrorist group Terra Lliure."[664] The second with contacts was related to Russia's campaign of influence in the media, and the third had contacts with an unspecified Russian group, which promised to support Catalonia's regional President Carles Puigdemont with 10,000 troops, if necessary, in a referendum's framework.[665]

2. North Macedonia's Path to NATO

North Macedonia (previously Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM) is located, like Montenegro, in the Western Balkans.[666] As the case study of Montenegro showed, "the Western Balkans are part and parcel of Russia's strategy to establish itself as a first-rate player in European security affairs, along with other major states such as Germany, France, and the UK,"[667] and "the region has always been of strategic significance, standing between Western Europe, Russia and the Middle East, and in the center of the debate for NATO and EU enlargement."[668]

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[663] Cristina Gallardo, "Russian Group Offered Catalan Separatist Leaders 10,000 Soldiers, Judge Says," *Politico*, October 28, 2020, https://www.politico.eu/article/russian-group-offered-catalan-separatist-leaders-10000-soldiers-according-to-judge/.

[664] Gallardo, "Russian Group Offered Catalan Separatist Leaders 10,000 Soldiers, Judge Says."

[665] Gallardo.

[666] Konstantin Testorides, "FYROM Officially Changes its Name to North Macedonia," Ekathimerini, February 13, 2019, https://www.ekathimerini.com/news/237638/fyrom-officially-changes-its-name-to-north-macedonia/.

[667] Dimitar Bechev, *Russia's Strategic Interest and Tools of Influence in the Western Balkans*, (Washington, DC: Atlantic Council 2019), https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/russia-strategic-interests-and-tools-of-influence-in-the-western-balkans/.

[668] Yordan Tsalov, "Russian Interference in North Macedonia: A View Before the Elections," Bellingcat, July 4, 2020, https://www.bellingcat.com/news/uk-and-europe/2020/07/04/russian-interference-in-north-macedonia-a-view-before-the-elections/.

North Macedonia joined NATO on March 27, 2020.[669] Before that, however, Macedonia was ruled by an authoritarian regime led by a nationalist prime minister, Nikola Gruevski, from 2006 to 2016.[670] The pro-Russian FYROM prime minister led the country into conflicts with neighboring countries such as Greece, and his nationalist regime created divisions between the country's Christian and Albanian Muslim communities.[671] In the 2016 general elections, however, the FYROM political opposition succeeded in overthrowing the Gruevski government, and the country set its course towards the West.[672]

The main obstacle to joining the West was FYROM's conflict with Greece over the country's name.[673] Because of the region of Macedonia in Greece, the Greeks feared that FYROM might have grounds for territorial claims against Greece.[674] For this reason, Greece hindered FYROM's efforts to join Western organizations such as NATO and the EU.[675] The dispute was resolved between FYROM and Greece in 2018 with the Prespa Agreement, paving the way for FYROM to become the Republic of North Macedonia.[676]

As in Montenegro, Russia used influence agents in its attempts to prevent North Macedonia from moving to the West and joining Western organizations such as NATO. Russia tried to suspend the Prespa Agreement by using a Russian-Greek businessman, Ivan Savvidis, whom the prime minister of North Macedonia "accused of paying far-right Macedonian nationalists and soccer hooligans, as well as the Greek clergy and government officials, to stoke opposition to the Prespa Agreement."[677] "In June 2018, after violent

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[669] "North Macedonia Joins NATO as 30th Ally," NATO, March 27, 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_174589.htm.

[670] Fabio Mattioli, "Authoritarianism in Macedonia," *Foreign Affairs*, January 12, 2017, https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/southeastern-europe/2017-01-12/authoritarianism-macedonia.

[671] Tsalov, "Russian Interference in North Macedonia: A View Before the Elections."

[672] Tsalov.

[673] Tsalov.

[674] Chris Harris, "Greece and FYR Macedonia Name Dispute: The Controversial Feud Explained," Euronews, January 24, 2019, https://www.euronews.com/2019/01/24/explained-the-controversial-name-dispute-between-greece-and-fyr-macedonia; Tsalov.

[675] Harris, "Greece and FYR Macedonia Name Dispute: The Controversial Feud Explained"; Tsalov.

[676] Harris; Tsalov.

[677] Tsalov.

demonstrations erupted in Skopje against the agreement, investigative reporters uncovered evidence that Savvidis provided at least 300,000 EUR to foment opposition to the deal, including a social media campaign aimed at stemming turnout for the September name-change referendum."[678] The soccer hooligans participating in demonstrations were supporters of the soccer club owned by another Russian oligarch residing in Skopje, the Macedonian capital.[679]

As it was in Montenegro, the GRU was active in North Macedonia. GRU officer Vladislav Filippov, a military attaché at the Russian embassy in Bosnia and Herzegovina, recruited Serbian intelligence officer Goran Zivaljevic.[680] These two intelligence officers' main task was to coordinate and direct the activities of influencing agents in Macedonia. Filippov and Zivaljevic mediated contacts between Moscow and the leader of the Democratic Party of Serbs in Macedonia.[681] These Russian and Serbian intelligence officers also supported the influence agent Savvidis and helped prepare for violent protests sponsored by the latter in the Macedonian name change process.[682] Third, Filippov and Zivaljevic collaborated with Miroslav Lazanski, a self-appointed journalist for the local Russian media channel Sputnik, whom the North Macedonian counterintelligence service considered "as one of the main pro-Kremlin propagandists in the country."[683]

Another leading media-related Russian influence agent in North Macedonia was, and still is, freelance journalist Krum Velkov. In addition to widely spreading local anti-Western and anti-NATO propaganda and conspiracy theories, Velkov was also involved in information operations in the 2016 U.S. presidential elections.[684] Velkov was the author of "the 'PizzaGate' conspiracy, alleging that Hillary Clinton had run a child sex ring in a

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[678] Tsalov, "Russian Interference in North Macedonia: A View Before the Elections."

[679] James Montague, "Macedonia's Ultra-Important Referendum," *Politico*, September 29, 2018, https://www.politico.eu/article/macedonias-ultra-important-referendum-greece-footbal-thessaloniki-ivan-savvidis/.

[680] Tsalov.

[681] Tsalov.

[682] Tsalov.

[683] Tsalov.

[684] Tsalov.

pizza shop."[685] Velkov had direct contacts with the coordinator of influence agents, oligarch Konstantin Malofeev, and RISS director Leonid Reshetnikov, both identified in the Montenegrin case study.[686]

Regarding the rest of the influencing, as it did in Estonia and Montenegro, Russia established a so-called central body in North Macedonia to coordinate and direct broader influence in the target country. This central body in North Macedonia appears to be the Russian Cultural Center in the capital, Skopje.[687] In addition to this central body, nearly 30 Russian-Macedonian "twinning associations" have been established in Macedonia, and Orthodox churches have been built across the country. In combination, these influencing organizations are "pushing an idea of 'pan–Slavic' identity and shared Orthodox Christian faith [in North Macedonia]."[688]

C.   CONCLUSION

Based on the framing provided by Chapter II and the studied cases, it can be said that Russian NTW campaigns require that there be no cohesive society in the target country. Contradictions and a divided society in the target country are the basis on which Russia can build an NTW campaign and choose the elements of NTW, non-state actors, to carry out the campaign. Thus, the most crucial aspect of launching and conducting an NTW campaign is the psychological influencing and so-called unbalancing of the target country's society and government. It is easier to run an NTW campaign where the public is already not homogeneous. In such environments, Russia seeks to preserve and amplify the target country's social contradictions. The author assesses that Russia's goal is not necessarily to make the society or government of the target country pro-Russian; the goal would also be fulfilled if the target groups' mentality coincides with Russia's interests, like the growing distrust of democracy, Western organizations, and Western unity.

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[685] Tsalov, "Russian Interference in North Macedonia: A View Before the Elections."

[686] Tsalov.

[687] Tsalov.

[688] Vuk Velebit, "Russian Influence in Macedonia: A Credible Threat?" European Western Balkans, November 14, 2017, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/11/14/russian-influence-macedonia-credible-threat/.

The psychological influencing of opponents, which includes propaganda and information operations in the media and cybersphere, as well as influence agents among the society of the target country, is the basis of the NTW concept. Russia primarily focuses on influencing in its preparations for an NTW because a successful influence campaign lays the foundation for creating and using the remaining NTW elements, for example, violent actors, once the campaign starts to develop. Russia uses pro-Russian auxiliary (ideological), proxy (overlapping objectives), and affiliate (acting for profit) violent non-state actors to hide its involvement in the conflict or to ostensibly distance itself from the struggle.

Nevertheless, it is challenging to distinguish which actors act in favor of Russia for what motives. The boundaries between the motives of violent non-state actors exploited by Russia are blurred and may change over time or in different situations. For example, the ideological pro-Kremlin Nashi members' primary motivation to support the local pro-Kremlin Night Watch in Estonia in the Bronze Soldier case was the financial bonus received for it. According to this example, by definition, auxiliary actors acted in this specific situation instead of as proxies or even as affiliates. As a reminder, auxiliaries are non-state actors who are ideologically motivated, proxies act primarily for their own interest and benefit that aligns with Russian interests, and affiliates operate mainly for profit. Therefore, it is probable that Russia is not paying particular attention to differentiate these subtypes of non-state actors, except that Russia's special services know what tools or techniques they can use to activate and exploit the different subtypes and apply these tools and techniques to different situations accordingly.

Organized crime cannot be categorized precisely into a particular violent non-state actor's subtype, and Russia seems to exploit organized crime throughout its NTW concept. As described in Chapter II, Russian special services use organized crime to carry out a wide range of assignments abroad.[689] It resembles a model that involves a combination of three subtypes of violent non-state actors—auxiliary, proxy, and affiliate. Russia's special

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[689] Galeotti, *Crimintern: How the Kremlin uses Russia's Criminal Networks in Europe*.

services use organized crime abroad, from influencing and cyber-attacks to armed attacks in a coup attempt, and to support, amplify, and mediate other non-state actors' activities.

Even though there was almost a ten-year gap between Estonia and Montenegro's events, a similar pattern emerged from the study of how Russia is likely to prepare for an NTW campaign and use non-state actors against the target country. The possible pattern found in the case studies, the non-state actors' links with Russia and the cooperation between non-state actors, are explained in this chapter's following sections. The sections are based on Russia's objectives and separate actors. At the end of these sections, the author has compiled a scheme that visualizes what has been described and helps the reader understand Russia's use of non-state actors and their cooperation more easily.

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        Monterey, California